

February
2022

Still Speaking

Newsletter of First Congregational United Church of Christ of Alpena

Board of Directors:

- Dennis Artley
- Deb Butler
- Bill Dempsey
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- Boris Gerber
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- Vicky Lindsay
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- Nancy Wedge

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Worship Service



Welcoming Strangers

Rev. Eugene Bacon

In my last sermon this January, I address the subject of outsiders - those who are clearly different in some ways from our own cultural group. I believe it is an important topic because I sense a growing suspicion toward people who are different from those with whom we normally associate. Republicans and Democrats, those who are for and against vaccinations and masks, those who are pro-life or pro-choice, those who are for the rights of minority groups and those opposed, and those who would like to defend our borders and potential immigrants - all these opposing groups square off, ready to fight. There is little willingness to listen, or attempts to understand or work out compromises. It seems that in so many areas we have chosen our sides and that's all there is to it. We know we'll never change and neither will they.

Whatever happened to the ideals that we once expressed as a nation? In the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson wrote: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that *all* men [and women] are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." And what about these iconic words written by Emma Lazarus and etched in bronze on the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty: "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free." They express such a welcoming, embracing stance toward emigrants from foreign nations escaping persecution or situations of abject poverty and looking to settle in the land of the free.

Yet when many people speak of immigrants today they speak of people who are poor, dirty, lazy, dangerous. They complain that these newcomers don't speak our language, understand our culture or practice our religion. There is great fear of our southern borders being overrun.

Allow me to share with you what the Scriptures have to say about strangers. On a number of occasions in the Old Testament, there is a clear statement about how to treat the stranger, the sojourner, the alien in our midst. For example, both Sabbath rest (Ex. 20:10) and cities of refuge (Numbers 35:5) were not **just** for the people of Israel, but for sojourners or foreigners, too. When the people of Israel harvested their crops, God commanded that they leave the **gleanings** for the poor and the alien (Lev. 19:9). In the New Testament, Jesus speaks of loving not just friends and relatives, but enemies (Mathew 5:44). He tells the story of a Good Samaritan who goes to extraordinary lengths to help a stranger (Luke 10:25-37). In the parable of the Last Judgment Jesus says, "I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a *stranger* and you invited me in..." [and remember] "whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me" (Matthew 25:35, 40).

Furthermore, today in our country, jobs are going begging. We need more waiters and waitresses, more home health care workers, more people to stock grocery store shelves, drive trucks, and unload containers from ships. Our

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birthrate in 2020 fell 4% to its lowest point ever. People are waiting longer to have children so our ratio of old to young grows larger by the year. We need the energy of young people to grow our economy. Could we be more compassionate as a nation and allow more people in, and even give more an easier path toward citizenship?

I would suggest that Scriptures, our own highest ideals, and our needs as a nation suggest that we could, and that perhaps we should. What do you think?

Blessings, Rev. Gene

Annual Meeting

Board of Directors

Many thanks to all who joined and participated in our 160th Annual Meeting on January 30. Making our voices heard and sharing our ideas, concerns, and hopes are paramount to the continued success of our church. Additional copies of the Annual Report are available on the table at the back of the sanctuary and in the church office.

Pastor's Class on Christian Mystics and the Mystical Tradition

Reverend Eugene Bacon

Beginning Wednesday, Feb. 16 at 1:15pm and continuing each Wednesday for seven more weeks, concluding with Wednesday, April 6, I will be leading a class on the western mystical tradition and Christian mystics. The class is a Great Courses class and will include two half hour DVD lectures with 15 minutes after each segment for discussion. Each class will be one and a half hours in length. The DVD presenter is Professor Luke Timothy Johnson, renowned for his insights into Christianity. He is the Robert W. Woodruff Professor of New Testament and Christian Origins at the Emory University Candler School of Theology. A former Benedictine monk and teacher at Yale Divinity School, he is the author of many acclaimed books.



Some of the topics include: The Biblical Roots of Western Mysticism, Mystical Elements in the New Testament, The Spirituality of the Desert, The Mysticism of Western Monasticism, Medieval Female Mystics, Mysticism Among Protestant Reformers, etc.

Each class will be one and a half hours in length. I've never taught a course on this subject but was somehow drawn to it. I have quoted several well-known mystics over the years in my sermons and would like to go deeper into this subject with you.

I am hoping that Covid will be tapering off by mid-February and that I will be able to teach this class in person. However if there are a number of you who would prefer to take this via Zoom, please notify the church office at 989-356-1795 or officeuccalp@gmail.com.

Blessings, Gene Bacon

Rotating Reverends

Judy Suszek, Office Administrator



Reverend Bob Case and Reverend Gene Bacon continue to alternate months of service. Reverend Case is ministering during the month of February. He will perform all weekly worship services and any additional services, funerals, weddings, baptisms, visits/calls that occur during the month. As always, to reach Reverend Case you may call the church office at 989-356-1795, call him directly at 989-657-0477, or email him at alpuccpastor@gmail.com.



An Oldie, But Worth Repeating

The Cracked Pot

A Water Bearer in India had two large pots, each hung on each end of a pole which he carried across his neck. One of the pots had a crack in it, and while the other pot was perfect and always delivered a full portion of water at the end of the long walk from the stream to the house, the cracked pot arrived only half full. For a full two years this went on daily, with the bearer delivering only one and one half pots of water to his house.

The perfect pot was proud of its accomplishments, perfect to the end for which it was made. But the poor cracked pot was ashamed of its own imperfection, and miserable that it was able to accomplish only half of what it had been made to do. After two years of what it perceived to be a bitter failure, it spoke to the Water Bearer one day by the stream. "I am ashamed of myself, and I want to apologize to you." "Why?" asked the bearer. "What are you ashamed of?" "I have been able, for these past two years, to deliver only half my load because this crack in my side causes water to leak out all the way back to your house. Because of my flaws, you have to do all of this work, and you don't get full value from your efforts," the pot said.

The Water Bearer felt sorry for the old cracked pot, and in his compassion he said, "As we return to the house, I want you to notice the beautiful flowers along the path." Indeed, as they went up the hill, the old cracked pot took notice of the sun warming the beautiful wild flowers on the side of the path, and this cheered it some. But at the end of the trail, it still felt bad because it had leaked out half its load, and so again it apologized to the bearer for its failure. The bearer said to the pot, "Did you notice that there were flowers only on your side of the path, but not on the other pot's side? That's because I have always known about your flaw, and I took advantage of it. I planted flower seeds on your side of the path, and every day while we walk back from the stream, you've watered them. For two years I have been able to pick these beautiful flowers to decorate my table. Without you being just the way you are, there would not be this beauty to grace the house."

Each of us has our own unique flaws. We're all cracked pots. But it's the cracks and flaws we each have that make our lives together so very interesting and rewarding. If we will allow it, the Lord will use our flaws to grace and beautify the world. So as we seek ways to minister together, and as God calls you to tasks He has appointed for you, don't be afraid of your flaws. Acknowledge them, and allow Him to take advantage of them, and you, too, can be the cause of beauty.

Fellowship Hour hosting help is needed for May through December. Please contact Bill Haase at 989-916-4104 or dsbhaase@live.com if you would like to volunteer your time.

Choir Corner

Kat Tomaszewski, Choir Director and Organist

PSALMS 100

A psalm for giving grateful praise.

1 Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth.

*2 Worship the Lord with gladness;
come before him with joyful songs.*

3 Know that the Lord is God.

*It is he who made us, and we are his;
we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.*

*4 Enter his gates with thanksgiving
and his courts with praise;*

*give thanks to him and praise his name. 5 For the Lord is good and his love endures forever;
his faithfulness continues through all generations.*



*First Congregational United Church of Christ
201 South Second Avenue
Alpena, MI 49707*

Phone: 989-356-1795 Fax 989-356-8825
Web Site: <http://uccalpena.org>
Email: officeuccalp@gmail.com
Office Hours: 9:00 am – 1:00 pm, Monday – Thursday

Sunday Worship: 10:00 a.m.
In person and Online

**Transitional Pastors: Rev. Dr. H. Robert Case
and Rev. Eugene Bacon**
Organist/Choir Director: Kat Tomaszewski
Treasurer: Denise Fusina
Office Administrator: Judy Suszek
Custodian: Mike LaMarre

Still Speaking

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February Celebrations

Birthdays

Avery Aten	February 3	Diedra Westenbarger	February 20
Greg Granum	February 3	Alison Bloom-Storey	February 21
Mary Minnick	February 8	Beverly Bodem	February 22
Richard Bloom	February 12	June Perry	February 23
Rebecca Wells	February 13	Roger Snell	February 25
Jay Kettler	February 16	Janet Artley	February 25
Bonnie Watkins	February 17	Joseph Beland	February 28
Jim Straley	February 18		



Anniversaries



Thomas & Judy Cook	February 5	63 Years
Jere & Diana Standen	February 11	55 Years



Happy Valentine's Day!

