



FIRST CHURCH CHATTER

April 2022

This is another edition of our church newsletter. We thank those members and friends who have contributed stories, biographies, reflections, letters, poems and encourage any who wish to contribute to our church newsletter. As you can read in this edition, we have many talented friends and church members. We would like to get to know all of you better and encourage you to send your thoughts, poems, stories, photos, to us to publish. Thanks so much.

The newsletter will be printed at the beginning of each month and be sent via email to church members and friends, be sent by mail to those who would prefer a written copy and be available in the foyer for all to pick up when the church is reopened.

We are always looking for stories, poems, photos, thoughts to contribute. If you have notices about upcoming events which you would like published, please let [Anne Short](#) or [Jody Green](#) know and we will try to include. Thanks.

In today's Chatter:

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Labyrinth Walk for Holy Week and Easter Monday

Hi Friends--I'm passing on this invitation from Lee Congregational Church to walk their labyrinth. I've heard it is lovely there. Road trip?

Thanks!

--Carrie

From: Martha Congdon

Subject: Labyrinth Walk for Holy week and Easter Monday You are invited

Please share this with your circle of friends and congregations. We invite you to Lee Congregational Church to take time in these days leading to Easter and the day after (a scheduled guided walk - on the way to Emaus)

- Sunday, April 3rd, 11:45am-2:00pm (guided)
- Tuesday, April 5th, 2:00-4:00pm (open)
- Friday, April 8th, 10:00am-noon (guided)
- Sunday, April 10th, 1:00pm-3:00pm (open)
- Wednesday, April 13th, 5:00-7:00pm (guided)
- Maundy Thursday, April 14th, 5:00-7:00pm (open)
- Good Friday, April 15th, 12noon-3:00pm
(During this 3-hour vigil of prayer, our pastor will lead us on the hour and half-hour in a 5-minute worship time. You can pray during all or part of the three hours.)
- Holy Saturday, April 16th, 11:00am-1:00pm (open)
- Monday, April 18th, 10:00am-noon (guided)

feel free to publish on your website or newsletter.

Thank you, and May Grace abound,
Martha Congdon

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A Potential Tragedy

Many thousands of years ago, visitors from outer space would have found our planet spinning and orbiting the sun with unbelievable precision. They would have found towering mountains, cascading waterfalls, spectacular cloud formations never to be duplicated, rivers rushing to the sea, oceans teeming with life forms, and millions of species interacting, living, evolving, dying, only to give way to new forms of life. If these same visitors were to see our planet today, they would find a new species having evolved, one which has created many marvelous features made possible by the human ability to use symbols, but others fueling conflicts over the centuries costing great loss of life in every generation. Today, they would see us experiencing widespread unrest and possibly destroying ourselves and others in spite of having the ability to manifest joy and compassion.

We are so fortunate to be living on this marvelous planet. What a tragedy if we destroy our earthly home by marring it by our tendency for wanting control. Let's learn to listen and have compassion for one another and for ourselves. Let's surrender pride and our obsessive need to be right. Let's appreciate that we are part of nature and learn to cooperate with her. Let's accept that we are but one of millions of other species on our paradise of a planet and that our ways of seeing are finite and fallible. We have a choice between continuing our conventional view of reality or being open to a deeper level of reality which is within us but transcends what we've come to think of as normal.

From the Epilogue of my book [Two Dimensions of Reality: A Depth Perspective on our time](#).

Dick Markham

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March 20, 2022, Third Sunday of Lent
First Congregational Church of Williamstown
Reverend Carol Killian:

Finding God in a Dry and Weary Land

I remember growing up, that Lent was a somber time, no laughing, no foolishness; being told that I must give up something like chocolate, but giving up Brussels sprouts just wouldn't do.

But over the years Lent has become more of an invitation, an invitation to develop a prayer practice, an invitation to let go of ideas and habits that are unhealthy, an invitation to move toward a better diet, and more exercise, an invitation to develop compassion toward people I don't normally relate to or even know, an invitation to use this meditative time to develop life enhancing tools.

Mark's invitation to join in an exploration of evil seemed on target, but would I focus on the evil out there --- and there is much evil and hate and greed and stupidity out there; or would I focus on the inner evil in our lives and hearts. Mark's invitation was to focus on immigrants and refugees. What evil drove them from their homes; what evils do they face in this land where if one is not white and Christian one can be singled out and attacked, or simply ignored; and what can we, the church, do to welcome and care for them, and to begin to address the evils they face in this new land.

All of us are immigrants and refugees, unless you happen to be an indigenous person. Our parents, grandparents, or great-great grandparents immigrated here to escape some evil. But it is true that even though we move around, we took our thoughts and prejudices with us.

I sometimes wonder what it was, or is, that makes we Western Europeans believe that our way of life is better than others, that our Christian religion is the only true religion, that we were simply better, better looking, better brains, a better work ethic, and a better way of life.

I remember being astounded when I first ran across the Doctrine of Discovery first articulated by Pope Nicholas V in 1452:

We grant you [Kings of Spain and Portugal] by these present documents, with our Apostolic Authority, full and free permission to invade, search out, capture, and subjugate the Saracens and pagans and any other unbelievers and enemies of Christ wherever they may be, as well as their kingdoms, duchies, counties, principalities, and other property [...] and to reduce their persons into perpetual slavery.

How awful, you might be thinking.

But in the Americas we had a similar Doctrine of Manifest Destiny that allowed us to take the land of the Indians and to reduce their persons into savages that could and should be killed off or pushed into small reservations on lands that were often deemed worthless or uninhabitable.

We looked at their ideas of partnership with Mother Earth as backward and quaint. Now in this time of global warming, they have much to teach us.

I remember a movie filmed in Africa where the tribes gathered around an animal they had just killed and thanked it for giving its life to provide food and clothing for their families. So different from the people I knew that hunted for sport.

We, as a culture, never stopped to consider a partnership with Mother Earth. We just took and keep taking the earth's resources- water, trees, oil, gas, coal, land, and felt permitted, even encouraged to punish or kill anyone who tried to stop us.

And now, we must contend with a Mother Earth that is not happy and hope that it is not too late. When I first started reading about The New Jim Crow, and how we white people treated the black people down south, I wondered what kind of people would bring their children to a lynching of a black man and buy post cards of the event.

Then I remembered stories of the early Christians being treated like animals in the Colosseum and the thousands of people who came to watch them kill each other as if killing people was as fun as a football game. I remember watching the movie, Ben-Hur and wondering at the praise and glory that went to the strongest and meanest killer.

Then I think of all the people who stood around watching George Floyd being slowly suffocated by a policeman's knee. True, some of the videos taken helped convict the officers, but they didn't help George Floyd.

I remember stories of the Emperor Constantine who saw the political power of the new Christian religion and went about baptizing thousands of conquered people and then telling them, you do, act, believe what I tell you or you are going to hell.

As a teenager, I remember watching The Lady and the Falcon. I focused on the love story, but totally overlooked the evil High Priest who kept the lovers apart to solidify his position and power.

While I read about the English kings and queens who killed off opponents or simply beheaded wives who didn't produce sons, I somehow didn't register how evil it was.

Now I am amazed at people who aren't horrified at Putin who would dare to invade a country he wanted, and when the Ukrainians didn't cave or rejoice at his coming, he seems committed to simply killing them off – men, women and children..... and there is the threat of nuclear weapons if the world stepped in.... Well, it worked for him in 1999 when he took Chechnya, and 2008 when he took Georgia, or 2014 when he took Crimea. But, perhaps the world has come together in ways he never suspected.

Do you sense that this is about to become a rant? But haven't some of those thoughts and feelings crossed your mind and hearts? Do you, like me, get so anxious, agitated, angry, overcome with feelings of helplessness that you can't go to sleep?

During Lent many years ago I discovered a most wonderful tool....a song. When I lie in bed anxious, worried or fearful, and can't get to sleep, I sing this song until my soul settles and my eyes close.

Bless the Lord My Soul, and bless God's holy name. x2
Bless the Lord My Soul, who leads me into life.

Our beliefs can exacerbate our agitation.

Belief in a vengeful God allows us to use vengeance as a tool.

Belief in an angry God allows us to use anger as a tool.

Belief in a judgmental God allows us to become judgmental of others.

To believe in a creative, loving, compassionate, forgiving God invites us to develop different tools.

Bless the Lord My Soul, and bless God's holy name. x2
Bless the Lord My Soul, who leads me into life.

I remember a BIO group, perhaps some of you were a member of that committee, who noticed that the bus routes mainly served white middle class communities, while poor neighborhoods couldn't get close enough to a grocery store to do their shopping. You didn't stand outside and protest or write letters. You didn't assume that the bus routes were laid out to punish the poor on purpose. As you assessed the routes, you saw a problem to be solved and developed ideas without blame, and the bus company agreed to change the routes. It was such a positive win, and so sad that it got very little publicity.

I know that our churches are mobilizing and developing teams to welcome and care for our refugees.

Not everyone has the time or energy to be on a team. But there are things you can do: You can continue to read. You can support the teams that form to help; You can smile and be welcoming to every person you meet; you can notice when someone is calling names, or putting down, or attributing malintent to one of your brothers and sisters – poor, black, Hispanic, Asian, Afghan, Republican, Democrat –take a deep breath, send as much unconditional love as you can muster and ask, with genuine curiosity, "What leads you to believe that about another human being?" And be prepared to listen without comment to their ideas.

It is hard. Sometimes I can do it, more often I wish I had done it. It is doubtful that you will change anyone's mind or behavior, but perhaps you will get them thinking.....or they will get you thinking. Change is a slow process and it begins within each individual heart. And Lent is a good time to assess what you believe and what you can do.

Bless the Lord My Soul, and bless God's holy name. x2
Bless the Lord My Soul, who leads me into life.

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Easter Memories: reflections from a time
of living in and sharing a different culture

Carolyn Behr

For nearly sixty years I have treasured with joy and gratitude the special experiences I was a part of during my time teaching school in Ethiopia in the early 1960s. At this time of year one of the most profound memories comes to mind: the preparations with our students for breaking the Lenten fast.

The first Peace Corps group (over 350 mostly young Americans) arrived in Addis Ababa in September of 1962, after a summer of training at Georgetown University in Washington, DC. We eventually spread out to secondary schools all over Ethiopia, which at that time included Eritrea. In that enormous country we doubled the number of high school teachers, so the effect was profound – both on the schools and on us.

My post was in Harar, an ancient Moslem walled city in the east, bordering on the Somali Desert. Our school was outside the walls and was a boarding school where students came from all over the empire to train to become teachers. So they represented a real mix of tribes, customs, and religions, but most of them were Coptic Christians. For them Lent and Easter were a really big deal.

Most Ethiopians are very proud of two major facts: they consider Ethiopia the first Christian country, since their emperor was converted in the 4th century and subsequent emperors carried on the tradition; and Ethiopia is the only African country not to have been a colony of a European nation – the Italians invaded in 1936, but they were expelled in 1941 without having been able to subject the population.

Most of our students chose to fast during Lent, which meant no food from sunrise to sunset. Some even refrained from drinking water during this time. The school provided hearty dinners for them after dark. But from Good Friday on most did not eat until the cock crowed on Easter Day.

Some of the teachers were invited by students to help them prepare for the breaking of their extreme fast. We gathered on the school grounds around 10pm on Saturday night and by the light of a bonfire we chopped vegetables for the stew pot, poured batter for their unleavened injera bread, and prepared a medicinal drink. This drink, which is made from crushed flax seed, helps the stomach accept solid food when it has been starved during a fast.

The seeds are poured into large wooden mortars made from hollow tree trunks and standing about four feet high. The pestles are heavy solid wood logs with slightly rounded ends that are raised by someone strong and then pounded into the receptacle to crush the seeds below. The result, after lots and lots of smashing, is a milky liquid that is easy on the stomach as it gets accustomed to regular food again.

During our shared tasks many students opened up with more personal stories than they had ever shared before and with questions about our lives back home in the US. The cool stillness of deep night and the light from the flickering flames inspired confidences that were not easy during the more businesslike school day.

Just after midnight our feast was ready and, since in Africa you can almost always hear a cock crowing at any hour, we sat and shared a meal that we had all prepared and that the students had most decidedly deserved after their 40 days of fasting.

In all the years since that time no Easter has held as much meaning for me. These young people were far from home studying to be teachers and hoping to become a vehicle for bringing their country out of poverty and illiteracy and into the 20th century. They were pioneers of a sort and they were brave to be tackling an overwhelming task, a task that sadly has not yet been completed.

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April 2020 Birthdays

7th Will Howie
8th Dick Markham
8th Ian Longhurst
13th Anne Short
13th Cynthia Payne
19th Hanbin Koo
19th Mark Seifried
26th George Robertson
30th Ward Bianchi

If you see these folks, be sure to wish them a Happy Birthday or send them a card!

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LUNCH BUNCH

The gathering of folks after church on Sunday for lunch has started again. This is such a wonderful opportunity for us to gather socially and to connect with our friends. This year's lunch bunch will gather at Pera Bistro on Spring St. each Sunday (not this Easter Sunday as folks probably have other plans). All are encouraged to come, no need to let us know, just show up. It's a great time with delicious food.

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