
JUNE 2021
VOLUME 34.6

The Messenger

St. John's United Church of Christ



Message from the Pastor

My friends,

Those who have studied the Bible and the ancient languages in which it was written seem to agree: the second letter to the church in Corinth represents the apostle Paul's theological struggles better than any other letter in the New Testament.

In it, Paul wrestles with and writes to one of the earliest gatherings of people of faith who were struggling themselves with this Good News; that is, the Gospel of Jesus Christ: "...Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.'" (Mark 1:14-15)

How do you feel about this? Is this Good News for us here, in 21st century Richmond, VA?

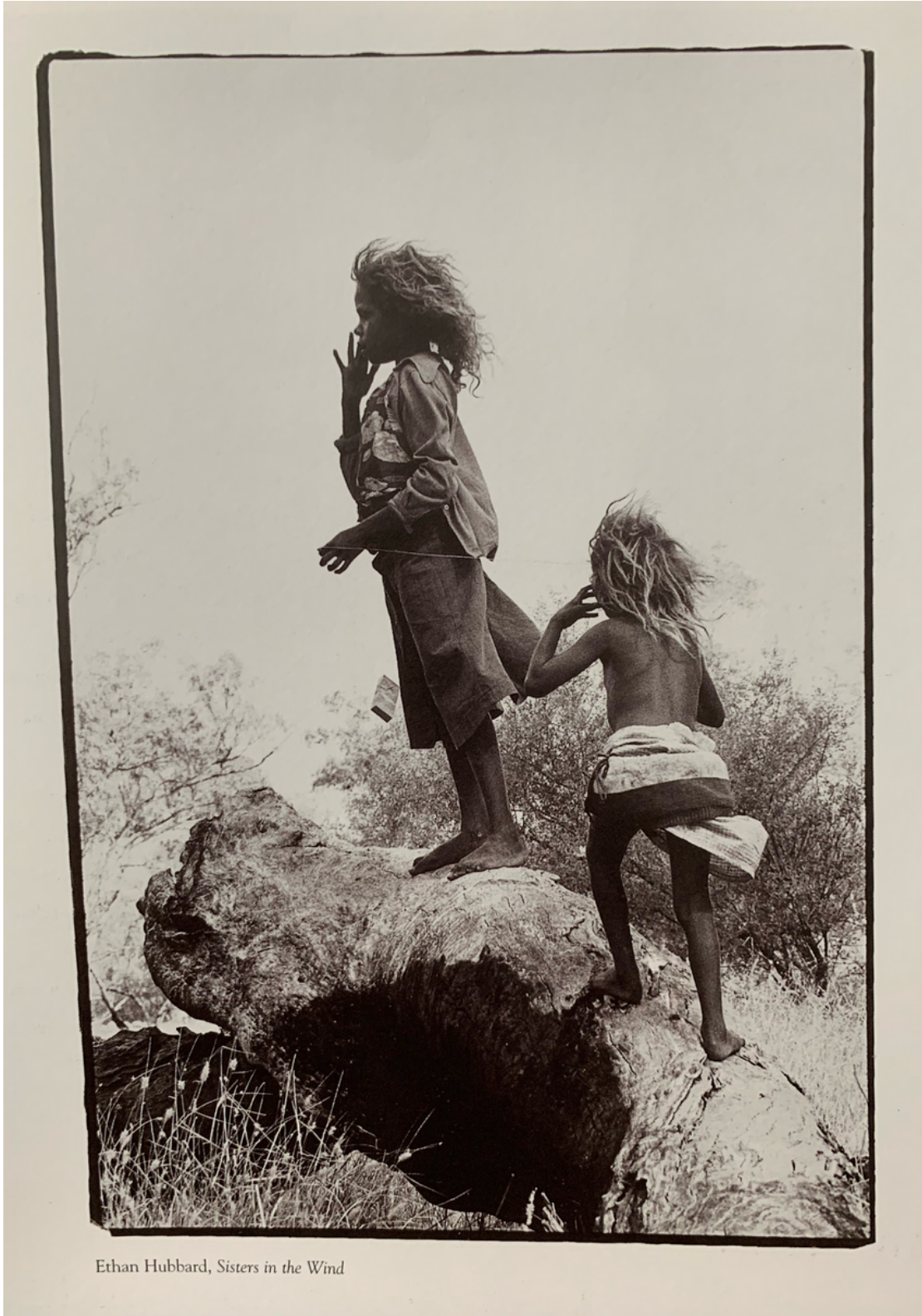
The photo on the page below is from a collection of artwork and writings called Imaging the Word. I offer this today because while I have and will continue to study the Bible, I am no scholar and I have no ancient languages. Very often I rely on contemporary resources like Imaging the Word, on lyrics from modern songwriters, and on my own experience of life in community, to more fully comprehend what God is up to in the world. I believe that our ancestors in faith were doing the same – reflecting on their life experience alone and together to understand the nature of relationship with one another and with God – and so reading their stories is essential to my theological struggles. But never to the exclusion of my own experience of life. And especially, most recently, my experience of life here with you people of St. John's UCC.

I will not claim to fully comprehend how or why things come about as they do. And sometimes the feelings I experience are contradictory to the principles of our faith. Yet, when all is said and done, I remain optimistic and believe in the Good News.

I think that the sort of delight I see in this photo is the residual feeling that is sustained in me with you all: like two sisters who have climbed to a high place together, facing into a strong wind on a hot summer day, we can look ahead and feel refreshed even by what we can not see.

So here's a quote for you... for St. John's UCC... and for the days ahead.

"That's why we live with such good cheer... it's what we trust in but don't yet see that keeps us going." (2 Corinthians 5:6a & 7)



Ethan Hubbard, *Sisters in the Wind*

June Devotional

Acts 2:44-47

“44 All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. 46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, 47 praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”

As we enter the Pentecost season, oftentimes the focus falls on the early church. While we can recognise that times are very different now than they were 2,000 years ago; many things have stayed the same. Recently I was reminded of the myth of the Cowboy. Oftentimes portrayed as a lone wanderer roaming the wide open spaces of the American West, making their way on their own. I call it a myth because in reality that was not how the West was “won.” Communities came together, towns formed, governments were set in place. As we look at this past year, what have been the things you have craved the most? Was it alone time? Was it doing things on your own? Or was it a connection with other people?

So many of humanity’s instincts actually rely on working together and being part of a group. In many ways, that is what God wants of us too. God values personal growth, but I think even more important is the growth of the church as a whole. As a community of faith, we are stronger and more capable of caring for each other than any of us are on our own.

God, may each of us pray and find a way to be a part of your church body. Amen.

Daniel Martin

From the Desk of the Council President

Time flies!!! It's truly amazing how quickly time slips away. Until we stop and look back to where we were, we don't realize how fast time flies or how far we've come.

In the fall of 2018 we finalized the sale of our parking lot so that we could renovate our building and the race was on. That seems like only yesterday to most of us, doesn't it? Yet here we are, three years later, preparing to worship again in our beautiful sanctuary on July 11th after being elsewhere for what feels like forever. It will be a true homecoming for us. Many of us have felt as if it would never happen in our lifetimes. And along the way many of those have become part of St. John's "cloud of witnesses" who enfold us with their memories and have made so many things possible.

It was the congregational meeting in May 2018 that I rejoined the Church Council after many years and began serving as President. It was a real honor to begin my service with such an amazing group of folks. Johanna Gilbert, Scott Siefert, and Laura Totty were on that Council with me, along with Betsy Bighinatti, Marcie Agee, David Agee and Rob Osborn. Those folks worked tirelessly along with various committee members to get everything accomplished for the parking lot sale and planning for the HVAC and other renovations. Sometimes daily phone calls and meetings and negotiations were taking place with the City of Richmond, the attorney for the buyer, the developer, the Historic District, and on and on and on. In the meantime, our Missions Committee was finding and involving us in great local organizations as part of our outreach. Our Worship and Music committee was helping plan upcoming services. The Facilities Committee, under Richard Bighinatti, got the necessary repairs done. The Congregational Life and Care Committee, chaired by Scott Siefert and then Betsy Bighinatti, was doing a great job planning activities and helping to keep our church community connected.

In 2019, Laura and Johanna left the Council, and their hard work and dedication cannot be over stated. Joining us that year were Jeff Jacobs and Daniel Martin. Jeff was already very involved with the Renovations Committee, along with Trustees Sarah Allen, Rob Osborn and then Jeff Hetzer. And as we were to find out in about nine months, Daniel's skills would become even more vital to our church in several ways.

In 2020, Kathy Freise and Terry Weaver joined the Council as we dealt with the sudden resignation of our Pastor, began to struggle with the Pandemic, moved into a virtual mode of worship and began meeting to keep all of us safe and together as a community. Scott Siefert moved to Minnesota with his wife, Chris Wing, and David Craig agreed to take his slot on the Council. Our Worship Committee, under the leadership of Rev. Beverly Lindsey, became a vital part of meeting our weekly spiritual needs during our search for an interim minister by providing us with a wonderful array of different preachers and styles of worship. We came to understand our resilience as a community in the face of fast-paced evolution.

The year 2020 was also a time of social upheaval, and St. John's found its building almost dead center in the struggle for social justice during the summer.

From our Juneteenth commemoration through our weekly vigils supporting peaceful protests and the Black Lives Matter movement, under the leadership of Terrie Pendleton and then Lindsey Franklin and Winston, St. John's has stood firm against the forces of institutional racism and white supremacy.

It was during 2020 that the Council decided that continuity of leadership would be helpful in maintaining our momentum in the face of so many other changes, and recommended that all officers stay in their positions for one more year. And so I ended up serving as President for three years instead of the usual two.

St. John's has made remarkable changes and progress in these past three years. The folks I have had the honor to serve with on your Church Council and committees have been nothing short of amazing. Betsy and Richard Bighinatti have been remarkably dedicated to the continuation of our operations in so many ways I cannot list them all. I so appreciate all of their hard work and counsel. Marcie Agee has kept us focused on our mission and outreach ministries, and we have been able to help so many, many folks through the funding that she was able to obtain from the Stille Foundation and your generous donations. Beverly Lindsey has done a fabulous job in keeping our worship timely and spirit-focused. Of course Shirley Townsend and the talented musicians whom she directs is the rock on which all of our music depends. Bud Higgins and Richard Bighinatti came every week to record Shirley and our other musicians and singers for worship. And I can't say enough about Daniel Martin and his skills in digital outreach that have helped to bring us together, share our message with the online community, and see us through our move to online worship and soon to a hybrid combination of in-person and online worship. Terri Weaver's insight has been invaluable. Kathy Freise has kept us informed and connected with our community, denominational and spiritual ministries. And I am very grateful to Jeff Jacobs and all he has done, from advising on legal matters, reviewing contracts, dealing with City agencies, and handling our Historic Tax Credit applications and negotiations, to documenting Council actions as Secretary. Scott Siefert helped get a regular bible study going, and even though he moved out of state, has continued to hold those sessions through the wonder of Zoom. Throughout it all, our church secretary, Melissa, has kept our communications up to day and put together the Messenger, among other duties.

I'm quite certain I have left out many folks who have been vital to our church's successful navigation, especially during the past year, and for that I humbly ask your forgiveness. Just take a look at all the faces, both near and far, on our Sunday morning worship. Each and every one of those faces, of YOU, have been instrumental to our blessed community.

It has been an honor to hold lightly the reins of Council President during these last three years of change here at St John's. We are experiencing an amazing Pentecostal moment in our church and our nation. The future is wide open and bright. Thank you for allowing me to serve.

Dreama

June Mission of the Month: GreenSpring

The June Mission of the Month is the GreenSpring Foundation, the nonprofit arm of the GreenSpring International Academy of Music.

GreenSpring is a national thought-leader in music education for students looking to positively impact the world. GreenSpring seeks to build good citizens and provide vibrant experiences through the power of music. From toddlers to seniors, music programs serve a diverse array of students, providing instruction at every developmental level. GreenSpring believes that everyone with the desire to play music deserves the opportunity to do so.

The GreenSpring Foundation is an innovative resource for increasing the appreciation, performance, instruction, and therapeutic value of the music in the greater Richmond area, Frederick, Maryland and worldwide.

The GreenSpring Foundation maintains and develops programs and performance opportunities for children and youth, regardless of financial means or disabilities, utilizing the harp as a catalyst for personal growth, community service and social change.

The Foundation is committed to providing life-transforming performance, service, and therapeutic opportunities which profoundly impact the lives of young musicians and the communities it serves.

Because of closures and cancellations due to COVID-19, this has been one of the most challenging years in the Academy's 25-year history as it has had to re-imagine, adapt, and innovate harp-based music education and performance. The American Youth Harp Ensemble and the Virginia Choristers are going ahead with their end of year performance, in person and live streamed on June 11th at 6 p.m. There is also a Summer Institute in June and July, and openings for students to take classes. These programs and more can be seen by going to www.greenspringmusic.org.

Our financial gifts can truly make a difference in the lives of the students GreenSpring serves.



GreenSpring

INTERNATIONAL
ACADEMY OF MUSIC

June Announcements

New Wednesday Night Bible Study Fellowship - Starting June 2nd at 7:00

All are invited to participate in our Wednesday Night Bible Study from 7:00 to 8:00 PM on Zoom, for 14 weeks beginning on June 2nd. Join other members of our beloved community to study the Word. All are invited, welcomed and affirmed. This is a great way to be with others in a time of study and fellowship.

We will be studying the Book of Acts, sometimes known as the Acts of the Apostles, with Interim Pastor Tom Gerstenlauer and Scott Siefert as our co-facilitators. Major themes, including the universality of the Gospel, the role of women, the work of the Holy Spirit, the fulfillment of Old Testament promises, and the nature and mission of the Christian church, will connect with St. John's active discernment in this time of interim ministry.

We will be using the Kerygma Program study guide, which costs \$22. Please contact Jeff Jacobs, at jwjacobs9@gmail.com or (202) 361-9887, if you'd like to order a book. We would love to have you in our group, so if cost is an issue we may be able to help out. If you have any questions about the study, please contact Scott Siefert at (804) 350-0826, or email him at sesiefert@gmail.com.

June Announcements

Pastoral Care

We are fortunate to have The Rev. Tom Gerstenlauer with us to provide spiritual support and pastoral care to our congregation. He can be reached at revtrgerst@gmail.com or (413) 378-0828. As you know, Pastor Tom is serving as our Interim Pastor on a three-quarters time basis, and this month will be unavailable from June 21-27. During that time, please contact the church office at (804) 358-9291 with any pastoral care emergencies.

Do you need food, or know someone who does?

As the pandemic continues, and people may be quarantined or feel unsafe going to the store, some of us may need help in maintaining food security, or know others who do. As you know, we are blessed with many terrific cooks at St. John's, and many have offered to provide meals to those who may need assistance. If you are having trouble getting to the store, would like to have some freshly-made food delivered, or know someone in need, please contact Jeff Jacobs at jwjacobs9@gmail.com or (202) 361-9887. Likewise, if you are able to be "on-call" to respond to a need for food, and have not already let Jeff know, please contact him to know of your availability.

In Sympathy

We extend our sympathy and condolences to the family and friends of Karl Yust, Karen-Marie Yust's father, who died in home hospice in Texas on March 19th, one day after Karen-Marie's parents' 60th wedding anniversary. May he know the peace of God's eternal light and love.

We extend our sympathy and condolences to the family and friends of Deborah Trinite, sister-in-law of Charlotte Quick, who died suddenly last week leaving behind a grown son. May she know the blessing of God's peace and love.

We extend our sympathy and condolences to the family and friends of Ken Warner, beloved husband of Roy L. ("Sonny") Darnell, Jr., who died on May 26th after a long illness. May he know the peace of God's eternal rest and love.

June Announcements

Guest Preacher, Sunday, June 27th - Scott Siefert

Our guest pastor for Sunday, June 27th, will be Scott Siefert. Scott is a member of St. John's United Church of Christ and a Member-in Discernment in the Potomac Association. He recently relocated to St Paul, MN after living in the Richmond area for over 20 years. He is currently doing a pastoral internship at St. Mark's United Church of Christ in Bloomington, MN. He earned a Masters of Divinity degree from Union Presbyterian Seminary and has a Bachelor's degree in Business Administration from the University of Maine. Although distanced from us in Minnesota, Scott continues to lead our engaging Wednesday night Bible Study remotely.

Fellowship Lunch June 17th

All are invited to this month's Fellowship Lunch, to be held at Forest Hill Park on Thursday, May 17th at 1:00 PM. If you'd like to order a box lunch from Montana Gold Bakery, please contact Jeff Jacobs at jwjacobs9@gmail.com or (202) 361-9887. Lunches are \$10, and include a large sandwich (chicken salad, pimiento cheese, turkey, ham or roast beef, with or without cheese; potato or pasta salad or potato chips; an orange and a cookie (oatmeal raisin, chocolate chip, snickerdoodle, peanut butter or gingerbread).

Congregational Life & Care Committee Meeting June 13th

The Congregational Life & Care Committee will meet after worship, by Zoom, on Sunday, June 13th. All are invited to attend to discuss and plan upcoming events. With the lifting of pandemic-related restrictions, particularly for outdoor activities, please bring your ideas for summer and fall fellowship and fun.

Return to Sanctuary July 11th

The Church Council has voted to have St. John's return to in-person worship in our Sanctuary on July 11th, at our regular 10 AM service time. In addition, we will continue to offer our worship service by Zoom for those who prefer to participate into that way. We anticipate that masks will be required in church, and more information will be provided as we get closer to July 11th, as additional guidance is provided by federal, state and local health authorities. Our primary interest is in keeping everyone healthy and safe. Along those lines, we encourage everyone eligible to receive a vaccination to get one.

June Announcements

UCC General Synod July 11-18

The UCC's General Synod, under the theme "Rooted In Love", will be held by Zoom this year from July 11-18, with opportunities for educational programs, inspirational speakers and worship. If you are interested in participating, or in learning more about the Synod experience, please contact past attendees Marcie Agee or Dreama Terrill for more information.

Congregational Meeting Held on May 16th

St. John's held its annual congregational meeting on May 16th to elect leaders for the 2021-2022 church year, which began on June 1st. David Craig, Jeff Jacobs, Daniel Martin and Lynn Snyder were elected to the Church Council; Rob Osborn was elected to the Board of Trustees; and Bud Higgins and Tony Sharpenstein were elected to the Endowment Board. The Congregation also approved the expenditure of up to an additional \$250,000 from the proceeds of the sale of the church parking lot to complete the new HVAC system in the education/office wing of the church and a number of other capital improvements.

St. John's History Needed!!

The History Committee is in the process of creating a History Gallery with highlights of our church's history. It will be located in the alcove near the elevator and contain an ever-changing array of historic memorabilia.

Do you have old pictures or old bulletins, flyers, or devotionals that we may not have? Please give us a hand by letting us borrow them. Also, do you have any historical anecdotes or interesting stories about church people, activities and events in our past? We are interested in information about all of the church locations over the years, not just the current building.

If you have any such material, especially if it can be digitized, please send it to us – Johanna Gilbert, Richard/Betsy Bighinatti, David Craig, or Dreama Terrill. We will love to hear from you.

June 2021 Calendar

Wednesday, June 2nd, 7 p.m - Bible Study by Zoom

Thursday, June 3rd, 9 a.m. - Renovations Committee Meeting by Zoom

Sunday, June 6th, 10 a.m. - Worship Service by Zoom

Wednesday, June 9th, 7 p.m - Bible Study by Zoom

Thursday, June 10th, 9 a.m. - Renovations Committee Meeting by Zoom

Sunday, June 13th, 10 a.m. - Worship Service by Zoom

Sunday, June 13th, after worship - Congregational Life & Care Committee meeting by Zoom

Monday, June 14th, 6:30 p.m. - Church Council Meeting by Zoom

Wednesday, June 16th, 7 p.m - Bible Study by Zoom

Thursday, June 17th, 9 a.m. - Renovations Committee Meeting by Zoom

Thursday, June 17th, 1 p.m. – Fellowship Lunch at Forest Hill Park

Sunday, June 20th, 10 a.m. - Worship Service by Zoom

Wednesday, June 23rd, 7 p.m - Bible Study by Zoom

Thursday, June 24th, 9 a.m. - Renovations Committee Meeting by Zoom

Sunday, June 27th, 10 a.m. - Worship Service by Zoom

Wednesday, June 30th, 7 p.m - Bible Study by Zoom

June Birthdays

June 2nd - June Smyth
June 4th - Savannah Quick
June 5th - Georgia Pollard
June 5th - Terry Pendleton
June 6th - Beth Oxenham
June 9th - Peggy Ford
June 9th - Phil Jones
June 13th - Tony Sharpestein
June 14th - Joe McGregor
June 19th - Helen Bunch
June 21st - Thomas Pridgen



St. John's United Church of Christ

St. John's United Church of Christ is a diverse community forming a united congregation, seeking to grow our faith, share it with others, and serve God's people wherever the need is present. We are living God's love and all are invited!!!

An Open and Affirming Congregation

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