



Maurie Hill took this picture for us about a month ago. I love it! I bet most of us have not seen our church from this vantage point!

"SpiritSpark"

**The First Baptist Church of
Manchester Center, VT**

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Pastor: Rev. Rebecca Sommons

JULY 2020

A MESSAGE FROM PASTOR REBECCA

Dear Church Family,

This year has been challenging every one of us to be adaptable. There are widespread changes that affect us in similar ways. We are learning to meet and pray and worship without being physically present in the same room. We are learning to wear masks when grocery shopping and how to follow the directional arrows in the store. We are learning to be more aware of how our choices (and those of our ancestors) affect not only our lives, but the lives of others.

There are also challenges and changes that are unique to our own lives and families. Some of us need to adapt to medical treatments that change our bodies and abilities. Some are trying to teach or learn through different means, and wondering what the next school year will bring. Some are navigating changing relationships or travel, work or moving, with hurdles and unknowns along the way.

Adaptability is key to both surviving and thriving in times of change. It requires flexibility in our thinking and a surrender of both what is familiar and our desire to control the situation. To adapt well, we also need to accept and face reality as it is. These are not easy things to face, but I believe that they are part of the way God works in our lives and helps us grow.

One of the synonyms for adaptability is pliability. It brings to mind the image of clay on the potter's wheel. The potter can only shape the clay as it yields to the pressure of his or her touch. Isaiah wrote: *"O Lord, you are our Father. We are the clay, and you are the potter. We all are formed by your hand"* (Isaiah 64:8). The prophet Jeremiah was led to the potter's house to learn how God was feeling about Israel's unwillingness to surrender to his shaping influence. God longed for them to acknowledge the truth of their heart-condition and to be open to his reforming them. Sadly, they replied: *"It's no use. We will continue with our own plans; we will all follow the stubbornness of our evil hearts"* (Jeremiah 18:12).

Brothers and sisters, may we choose to embrace truth, to surrender to God's shaping Spirit, to trust that our essential identity will not be lost, but rather seen even more clearly. When we are pliable and adaptable in God's hands, we will fulfill our greatest purpose in life ~ to bring glory to God. Paul said it this way: *"For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us"* (2 Corinthians 4:6-7).

As we celebrate Independence Day on the Fourth of July, may we also remember that our freedoms are gifts. They are not given so that we approach life as if it is all about us and what we want. They are given so that we can live out our purpose in harmony with God's will and in harmony with those around us. Doing this well requires awareness, surrender, and adaptability. Perhaps you might join me in praying for the Holy Spirit to help us grow in these areas for God's glory.

Love in Christ,
Pastor Rebecca



Photo by David B. Craton (2007)

DIACONATE

Throughout this past month, most of our Diaconate conversations have centered around the re-opening of our sanctuary for Sunday services with consideration for the safety and comfort for all of our parishioners uppermost in our minds. The Re-entry committee has done an excellent job working through this critical task. Carol Lattuga is our representative on the Re-entry committee, and you can find her report in this newsletter.

We also want to thank you for your consistent giving to our Fellowship Fund. It is a vital part of our ministry and we are grateful that it is ready to go to work whenever a need arises! If you, or someone in our church family, has a need, let Pastor Rebecca or one of the Diaconate members know.

Your Diaconate members: Cara Davenport, Anna Ennis, John Hess, Carol Lattuga, Linell Pike, Martha Thompson, Jim West, Kelsey Towlsee and Pastor Rebecca.

Respectfully submitted,
Kelsey Towslee, Secretary

RE-ENTRY COMMITTEE: Jeremy Crumb, Ray Koch, John Hess, Carol Lattuga

The committee is tasked with and committed to planning for the safe return of our congregation to the sanctuary for regular services and celebrations of the Word of God. We are committed to preserving the safety of our congregation in conjunction with the State of Vermont's rules and regulations regarding the COVID19 pandemic. In that light, we choose to do this process of reentry carefully, and have, as a committee, been keeping track of new information and advisories to update the methods we have been exploring.

As you know, zooming services continue to work reasonably well, and will continue even after we return to the sanctuary, so those with compromised health will still be able to participate. Many of our members have been part of keeping in touch with each other and with the people who do not have access to computers.

The service of June 28th was our first service from the sanctuary and was attended by those who cannot have "zoom" access. It gave us a chance to try the new normal and went pretty well! Our thanks to Jeremy for his amazing technical skills and deep dedication to making it all work!! Also, thank you to John Hess, who is responsible for creating all the safety barriers. The committee has all participated, including our pastor, Rebecca, in getting the church ready for our return, but it is still a work in progress. We will be doing our first full service on July 5th at 9:30 am, and there will be people and signs to direct those who are able to attend. We will continue to modify procedures as needed.

We ask for your continued prayers and patience in this difficult time for all and are thankful for the love and support of our God.

In Jesus' name.

Members of the Re-entry committee

MARY MARTHA FELLOWSHIP

Since our last meeting on June 21st, we have had an appeal from the Summer Lunch Program for funds, a thank you from the Emergency Needs Fund and a thank you from Linda Bushee for Christmas cookies and amaryllis.

The Mary & Martha Fellowship will not be meeting during July or August, but we look forward to getting together on September 13, 2020!

~Martha

Mary & Martha Basket Party

Since the Governor has raised the limit of people to 75, our Basket Party at this point in time is a go for Saturday, September 19th at the VFW Post rooms. I will have to change a couple of things from the past like the cost and how we do food. If it's a nice day we will also put some tables outside to provide more distance. I will put all of the particulars in next month's newsletter. In the meantime, please keep gathering items for your baskets. We need LOTS! People have been cooped up for a long time. I am sure we will have a good turnout. I will keep monitoring the situation as we move forward.

~Lorraine

INTERFAITH COUNCIL OF THE NORTHSHIRE

The council will not meet in July and August.

The Kids Summer Lunch program has begun distribution of food for the summer. If anyone cares to make a donation or help prepare food bags, please contact Karen Allen at 362-1465.

Neighbor to Neighbor is reviewing their mission statement and seeing how we can be more helpful to our neighbors during this unprecedented pandemic.

IFC meetings will resume on September 4, 2020. Cantor Scott Buckner is chair of IFC and can be reached at Israel Congregation Office 362-4578.

~Martha Thompson

PRUDENTIAL COMMITTEE

Hello Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

We are excited to begin limited services in our sanctuary. During the foreseeable future, we will be using the hybrid format for our services. The services will take place in the sanctuary with limited attendance. If you or someone close to you are vulnerable, I encourage you to continue attending through the Zoom online service. With limited seating, it is also good for attendees who are comfortable with the Zoom services to continue doing so. If you plan to attend services in person, please practice proper distancing and antiviral measures to protect our brothers and sisters who are vulnerable. Also, I encourage you to continue praying for healing of those affected by Covid-19 directly or indirectly, and for a vaccine and cure.

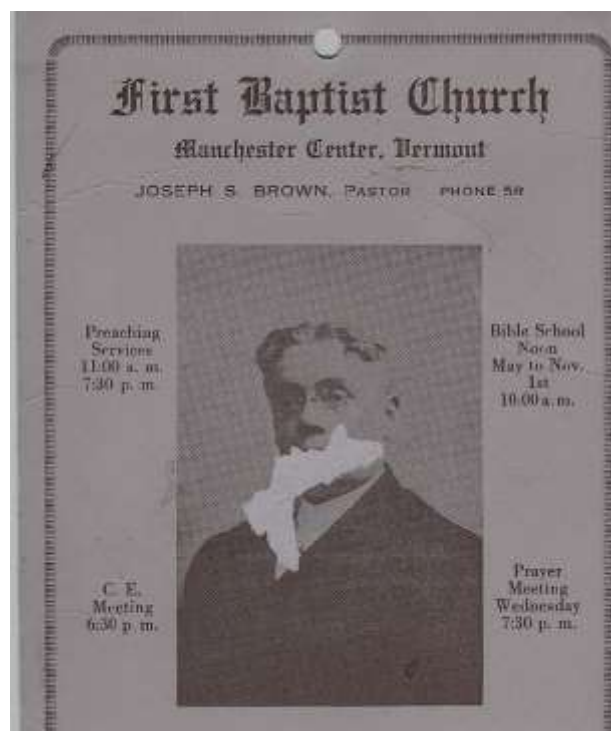
Regarding other projects, work is being done. The roof work will continue mid-July. The crane is scheduled for July 14 (the rain date is July 15). While fixing any loose or missing slates, the company will also paint any steeple trim which is in need of a new coat. Additionally, the stained floor tiles in the vestry will be replaced soon, and the paint in the Main Street entrance and stairway to Joy Hall will both be repainted.

With the Sommons family moving to their new home in early August, we are planning a vote on August 9 to determine the future of the parsonage. If you need information to guide your decision, please reach out to me for it. Please thoughtfully and prayerfully consider how this affects the future of our church and its mission.

We are encouraged by the reopening process and hope to see you soon. Please let any member of the committee know if there are building issues which need to be addressed. Thank you and praise the Lord with all your heart, mind, and strength!

Humbly submitted for His glory,
Jeremy Crumb, Prudential Committee Chairperson

Shawn Harrington (MHS) sent this “New Year’s Greeting” to me this week. Although it is not the beginning of a new calendar year, July will be our first time gathering in our sanctuary in over three months, and with the changes we will encounter, it may feel like a new beginning! So, here is a greeting to our new year by Rev. Brown who served from 1901-1906 and from 1912-1922. We can look at the tear in the photo as a tear or we can look at it as a face mask that needs some adjusting.
(This photo of Pastor Joseph S. Brown comes from our church web site.)



On May 3rd, Pastor Rebecca used the following devotional in her sermon. Several people found it powerful. A portion of it is printed here with permission from the author Diane Halliwell.

So, for a time, having studied lots of the Bible, I was getting into theological discussions with people . . . and I must admit, I surely did NOT have all the answers from a theological viewpoint, and sometimes I would allow the discussion to go on and on, being challenged on questions I just could not answer.

Such was the case on a plane ride with my boss at the time. He is a clever kind of guy, and argumentative, and we were engaging in a deep theological discussion. All of a sudden, as I was literally lost for a direction, I clearly felt the leading of the Holy Spirit, and I said this . . . "I cannot answer that question, but what I can tell you is the different that Jesus has made in my life." THAT WAS THE MOMENT I UNDERSTOOD . . . Jesus was NOT a religion to me . . . Jesus was NOT a set of rules for me . . . Jesus was a LIFE-CHANGER for me! My boss could sit there and question everything about Christianity, BUT HE COULD NOT QUESTION HOW I WAS CHANGED . . . how my bitterness and anger changed to forgiveness, how my self-hatred turned to "accepting who I was in Christ" . . . how my protective walls crumbled, and instead of being within myself, Christ taught me to look outward . . . at people who I could help because of how Jesus changed my life . . . SAVED MY LIFE.

All of a sudden my boss' demeanor changed . . . this conversation made him uncomfortable, because he could not control it, he could not argue with it . . . He changed the topic!

From that point forward (and it was about 8 years ago), I understood how I was to share Christ with others. I became the "Samaritan woman at the well", who after her encounter with Jesus, went back to town and talked about His forgiveness, and many followed Him . . . I was the woman the Pharisees wanted to stone because of her sin . . . and in the face of Jesus' lack of condemnation and forgiveness, followed Him . . .

CHURCH DATES

Wednesday, July 1 Missions meeting at 3 pm either in person in vestry or through zoom

Thursday, July 2 Re-entry Committee meeting at 3:30 pm through zoom

Sunday, July 5 Worship Service at church and through zoom at 9:30 am (also celebrating communion)

Tuesday, July 14 Prudential Committee at 5 pm via zoom

Wednesday, July 22 Diaconite meeting at 4 pm via zoom

All Tuesdays: Prayer Group at 7 pm via zoom

Sunday, August 9 Church meeting following worship



NOTE:
Our Sunday services will
be moving to 9:30 am
beginning on July 5th!

IMPORTANT CONTACT INFORMATION

Church Office Hours 9:30-12:30 AM on Tuesdays and Wednesdays

Pastor Rebecca's e-mail address: rebeccasommons@gmail.com

Pastor Rebecca's cell phone: (802) 688-3024

Church Office Phone: (802) 362-1555

Please call to request a meeting or visit outside of regular church office hours.

FLOWERS

July 5: The Squires Family

July 5: Bruce Fielding

July 12: Flower Arrangement

July 19: Jackie Perry

July 26: The Squires Family

