



# USING THE BIBLE

June 6, 2020

North Congregational Church  
New Hartford, Connecticut

WORSHIP FOR THE THIRTEENTH TIME  
THAT WE ARE NOT GATHERING IN OUR SANCTUARY  
BECAUSE WE WISH TO HONOR THE NEED FOR PHYSICAL DISTANCING  
IN ORDER TO PREVENT THE SPREAD OF THE CORONAVIRUS

---

On the first Sunday of every month it is our tradition to celebrate the Sacrament of Holy Communion. Since we cannot gather together, you are invited to receive it in your home. In our liturgy this morning, a liturgy is included for your use. In preparation, you are encouraged to create a simple altar for yourselves, perhaps light a candle, and set out some bread and wine or juice.

## FOR YOUR MEDITATION

*I hear people all the time say, well I read through the Bible last year. Well, so what? I'm all for reading through the Bible. But how much of that got on the inside, or did they just cover three more chapters today? I would never discredit reading the Scriptures, but it is important to meditate on it.*

-Charles Stanley, (1932- ), Senior Pastor, First Baptist Church, Atlanta, Georgia,

*Whatever you learn, remember: the learning must make you more, not less, human.*

-Elie Wiesel (1928-2016), writer, professor, political activist, Nobel laureate, and Holocaust survivor

*Lincoln, steeped in the Bible and Shakespeare, set an impossibly high bar for presidential prose.*

-Jonathan Raban, (1942- ), British travel writer, critic, and novelist

---

## THE PEACE OF CHRIST

It is normally our custom when we gather to extend the Peace of Christ to one another. Even though we are physically apart at this time, may you know that peace.

### CALL TO WORSHIP

Let us still our bodies and our minds on this Sabbath, a day set apart in Scripture as a day of rest and a time for us to come before God with our whole hearts. We are mindful of the unrest in our nation, as our attention is called especially to racial injustice, which has a long history and sadly continues into our time. As Christians, we give thanks for the Bible, but we confess our lack of attention to, and knowledge of, it. May we be reminded to turn to it for its wisdom and challenging instructions that guide us everyday, but especially now in these troubled times.

OPENING HYMN  
LIFE

*Wonderful Words of Life*

Tune: WORDS OF

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u8ISYNpNYow>

### SCRIPTURE READINGS

Matthew 5: 1-11

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. <sup>2</sup>Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

3 ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

4 ‘Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

5 ‘Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

6 ‘Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

7 ‘Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

8 ‘Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

9 ‘Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

10 ‘Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11 ‘Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. <sup>12</sup>Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Matthew 6:1, 5-6

“Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven....”<sup>5</sup>“And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. <sup>6</sup>But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

MORNING MEDITATION  
Cox

“Using” the Bible

The Rev. Marcia Lynn

How do you use the bible? Do you? What does it mean to you? How knowledgeable about it are you? Does it matter?

Last week in my Pentecost sermon, I observed that the Holy Spirit means many things to many people. One could certainly say that about the Bible. Most commonly it is referred to as “the Word of God.” But what exactly does that mean? The Bible contains many words, words spoken by a variety of people through a number of centuries. And God speaks words that often contradict each other. In one book we find a forgiving and loving God, a ruler concerned with justice; in another, an angry, vengeful and punishing God, an ever-present creator and helper and a God who seems far away.

It is complex book for certain, and one that scholars spend lifetimes studying...and academics often specialize in a few books or very limited aspects of its creation and ideas.

The writings in the New Testament, or the Christian bible, as you well know, tell of the life and teachings of Jesus, written by authors of Mark, Matthew, Like-Acts and John and of course the Epistles, most of which were written by St. Paul. None of these writers were contemporaries of Jesus. Yet in our faith tradition, it is a holy book...the only book that tells about the teachings and life of Jesus.

It is easy to open the bible, pick out a verse or two to prove a point. This is known as “proof-texting,” and it can be very dangerous, particularly when one is trying to justify violence, injustice or, for example, the practice of slavery, the diminishment of women or the condemnation of homosexuality. The words can be life-giving or life-destroying. Yet, in some circles, when someone quotes the Bible it can give him or her an air of authority. If the Bible is speaking God’s word, and someone quotes a passage, he or she thinks they are, or claims to be, speaking for God.

The Bible has received particular attention this week, in light of an action by the current President of the United States, this past Monday, June 1. Briefly, and I'm sure you seen the photographs and videos by now, after giving a speech in the Rose Garden, he walked with a number of his aides from the White House to Lafayette Square, the area in front of St. John's Episcopal Church, stood next to the church sign and had his photograph taken, holding up a Bible.

Here is the report from a Religion News Service.

“Trump said relatively little, positioned stoically in front of the boarded-up church, which had been damaged the day before in a fire during protests sparked by the death of George Floyd on May 25 in Minneapolis.

The church appeared to be completely abandoned.

It was, in fact, abandoned, but not by choice: Less than an hour before Trump's arrival, armored police used tear gas to clear hundreds of peaceful demonstrators from Lafayette Square park, which is across the street from the church....

‘They turned holy ground into a battleground,’ said the Rev. Gini Gerbasi. Gerbasi, who serves as rector at a different St. John's Episcopal Church, in nearby Georgetown, arrived at St. John's Lafayette earlier that day with what she said were at least 20 other priests and a group of laypeople. They were organized by the Episcopal Diocese of Washington to serve as a 'peaceful presence in support of protesters.'

The volunteers and clergy offered water, snacks and hand sanitizer to demonstrators who were gathered in Lafayette Park across the street — which sits directly in front of the White House — to denounce racism and police brutality after the death of [George] Floyd. But sometime after 6 in the evening, when volunteers were packing up supplies, Gerbasi said police suddenly began to expel demonstrators from the park — before the 7 p.m. curfew announced for Washington residents earlier in the day.

‘I was suddenly coughing from the tear gas,’ she said. ‘We heard those explosions and people would drop to the ground because you weren't sure what it was.’

The Rev. Glenna J. Huber, rector of the Church of the Epiphany, another downtown Washington church, was at St. John's but left as the National Guard arrived. She said she watched as police rushed into the area she had just fled.

(Jack Jenkins, June 2, 2020, Religion News Service)

When asked by a reporter if it the Bible was his, our President's response was, “It is A Bible.” He never opened the Bible, neither spoke any words, nor did he say a prayer. In a way, this was even worse than “proof-texting,” since we don't know what he was thinking or why in the world he even had his photograph taken with it. Was he using its authority to justify his orders to have armored police use some form of pepper spray or gas to clear the square in preparation for his arrival?

Those of us who have followed his career and relationship to religion and scripture find this particular act puzzling, if not lacking in credibility.

In a 2015 interview on Bloomberg's "With All Due Respect" two reporters noted the fact that he said that the bible was his "favorite book," with his own book, "The Art of the Deal" being a close second. In light of that claim they asked him what passages from the Bible were his favorites, had meaning for him. His answer: "I wouldn't want to get into it. Because to me, that's very personal," he said. "The Bible means a lot to me, but I don't want to get into specifics."

Trump, who once referred to communion as "my little wine and my little cracker," was asked if he preferred the New or Old Testament, he answered, "Probably equal. I think it's just incredible," he said. "The Bible is very special."

(sources: Eugene Scott, CNN Eugene Scott, CNN, August 27, 2015, "Trump says Bible is his favorite book, but declines to share favorite verse" and <https://youtu.be/ERUngOUCsyE> )

In another interview, in 2016 when he was the front-runner for the Republican nomination, he actually did mention a bible verse that he liked, "an eye for an eye." Here is a report of that interview:

"Trump was recently given a second chance at providing a favorite Bible verse. ABC News reports that Trump was recently asked by conservative radio host Bob Lonsberry if he had a favorite Bible verse or story that "informed" his thinking or character.

'Well, I think many,' Trump responded. 'I mean, when we get into the Bible, I think many, so many. And some people, look, an 'eye for an eye,' you can almost say that. That's not a particularly nice thing.' .... I mean, when you see what's going on with our country, how people are taking advantage of us, and how they scoff at us and laugh at us. We have to be very firm and have to be very strong,' stated the billionaire businessman."

(Veronica Neffinger, "Trump Cites Favorite Bible Verse: 'an Eye for an Eye' ," April 15, 2016, [crosswalk.com](http://crosswalk.com))

If our President had any knowledge of scripture, or most importantly Christian teaching, he would have been familiar with the teachings of Jesus. Here is one explanation of the meaning of this concept in both the Old and New Testaments:

"'Eye for an Eye' originates from the Code of Hammurabi and is found in the Old Testament books of Exodus and Leviticus. It is also referenced in the Sermon on the Mount by Jesus, found in the New Testament. Its meaning in the Bible was simply, the punishment or sentencing should equally match the crime.

From scripture, Exodus 21:23-25 states, "But if there is harm, then you shall pay life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for

wound, stripe for stripe." Leviticus 24:19-21 echoes this assertion, "Anyone who injures their neighbor is to be injured in the same manner: fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth. The one who has inflicted the injury must suffer the same injury."

For both passages, the phrase is used in the circumstance of a court case before a civil authority such as a judge. "An eye for an eye" was thus intended to be a guiding ethic for legislators and judges; it was not meant to advocate personal vengeance.

Furthermore, Jesus condemns the practice of personal retaliation in the Sermon on the Mount saying, "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you do not resist an evil person. If anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you" (Matthew 5:38-42).

(Crosswalk Editorial staff, What Does "Eye for an Eye" Mean in the Bible?, May 4, 2018, <https://www.crosswalk.com/faith/bible-study/eye-for-an-eye-biblical-meaning-and-significance.html>)

Many religious leaders from around the nation and the world have been dishearted, to say the least, by our President's use of the Bible in front of St. John's Episcopal Church.

The Rt. Rev. Mariann Budde, the bishop of Washington who helped organize the clergy presence at the church, said Trump's arrival at St. John's happened without warning and left her "outraged."

"The symbolism of him holding a Bible ... as a prop and standing in front of our church as a backdrop when everything that he has said is antithetical to the teachings of our traditions and what we stand for as a church — I was horrified," she told Religion News Service.

"He didn't come to pray. He didn't come to lament the death of George Floyd. He didn't come to address the deep wounds that are being expressed through peaceful protest by the thousands upon thousands. He didn't try to bring calm to situations that are exploding with pain." (Jack Jenkins, June 2, 2020, Religion News Service)

Two others observed this:

"The Bible as a talisman has real political power. But we believe the words inside the book are more powerful. If we unite across lines of race, creed and culture to stand together on the moral vision of love, justice and truth that was proclaimed by Jesus and the prophets, we have the capacity to reclaim the heart of this democracy and work together for a more perfect union."

(William J. Barber II and Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, "Trump's use of the Bible was obscene. He should try reading the words inside it," June 2, 2020, The Washington Post)

One could easily accuse religious leaders of “proof-texting” when they favor the teachings of the prophets and Jesus, which correspond to our innate sense of compassion and justice. And some might say that we do not need the Bible to know right from wrong, but it doesn’t seem to be clear that everyone possesses an innate sense of ethics and empathy. And even those of us who try to act kindly, at least in my experience, need frequent reminders, and find ourselves continually challenged and uplifted when we read the words of the prophets and the authors of the gospels and the epistles.

It is one thing to be lacking in knowledge about the Bible (it’s never too late to learn), but quite another to announce that is your “favorite book” or that it is “incredible” when you can only name one passage as your favorite, one that “isn’t very nice” at that.

Our constitution guarantees the separation of church and state and so we don’t require our President to be a Christian. It is one thing not to be a Christian, but quite another to claim to be one without knowing much about the teachings of the Bible. And disrespectful to use the book which contains the text of our faith simply as a prop for a photo opportunity rather than to study and engage with it, and apply the wisdom contained inside to lead, and bring healing to, our nation.

We long for a President who will use intelligently and prayerfully by opening it up and acquainting himself with, and reflecting on, its contents.

But may we too, who call ourselves Christians, equally in need of wisdom, guidance and compassion, do the same. Amen.

#### PRAYER

This week when our attention is turned to an overt display of violence and cruelty born of racism, we continue to hold in our hearts all people of color especially those who have been disrespected, harassed and killed simply because of the color of their skin. We stand with them in their fight for respect, compassion and justice. Enable us to help to put an end to feelings of hatred and displays of violence.

We offer our prayers for:

-those who are hungry

***And for those who will not feed them.***

-those who struggle each week to pay their bills

***And for the wealthy who do not care.***

-those who are homeless

***And for those who deny them shelter.***

-the sick and lonely

***And for those who will not give them comfort.***

-those who cry out for dignity

***And for those who will not listen.***

-those oppressed by unjust wages

***And for those who exploit them.***

-those who bear the yoke of prejudice

***And for those who discriminate against them.***

-those whose basic needs are denied

***And for public officials who cater to the greedy and ignore those bound unjustly.***

*(Adapted from a prayer by Rebecca Sutton, Program Coordinator of Global Women's Exchange. Prayers for a Just Economy, a prayer service calling for an increase in the federal minimum wage held in Washington, DC, July 24, 2013.)*

We are mindful, healing God, of all who are suffering from diseases of the body, the mind and the spirit, especially.....

For those who are preparing for medical procedures....

For those who care for the sick and the dying....

For those people facing death

For all who have passed into care and for family and friends who mourn their loss.....

In our own lives, we bring to you now our joys and concerns....

All these things we offer, using the words of the prayer that Jesus taught us,

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name,  
thy kingdom come, thy will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

## OFFERING

Although we are not gathering in the sanctuary for worship on Sundays for the time being, the church continues to have expenses. So it would be most appreciated if pledges and offerings could be mailed to the church at P.O. Box 307, New Hartford, CT 06057. Thank you for your generosity.

HYMN OF PREPARATION *Let Us Break Bread Together* sung by Joan Baez

<https://youtu.be/2VZ3oWo--AM>

## THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY COMMUNION

### OPENING WORDS

Jesus shared meals in all kinds of homes:  
In the home of Zacchaeus, a wealthy and corrupt tax collector;  
In the home of Simon, a Pharisee, where he defended the woman  
who caused a scene at the dinner party;  
In the home of Martha, Mary and Lazarus, his friends,  
a house where he could laugh and relax.

We are accustomed to sharing this meal in our sanctuaries, spaces set-apart as sacred.  
But this is where it all began, in ordinary houses,  
in upstairs rooms and wayside inns and around kitchen tables.  
In the spaces where people live, surrounded by the ordinary clutter of living.

### BLESSING

Come, living Jesus, be our guest, here in our homes.  
Come, living Jesus, be our host, here at your table.  
Come, Holy Spirit, pour out your blessing on our bread and wine  
and on us, your people, physically separated as a congregation  
but united in this blessed sacrament.

### WORDS OF INSTITUTION AND THE SHARING OF THE BREAD AND THE CUP

Let us hear, again, the story of Jesus' supper with his disciples on the night before he died, as it's been recorded by the writer of the Gospel of Matthew:  
While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, [*take bread*]  
and after blessing it he broke it, [*break bread*]  
gave it to the disciples, and said, 'Take, eat; this is my body, broken for you.  
Do this in remembrance of me.'  
Ministering to you in his name, we offer you this bread. [*We share the bread.*]  
This is the bread of life. Take and eat. [*We eat the bread.*]

Then he took a cup, [*take cup*]  
and after giving thanks he gave it to them, [*lift cup*]  
saying, 'Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the new covenant,  
which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.'  
Ministering to you in his name, we offer you this cup. [*The juice/wine is shared,*]  
This is cup of forgiveness and blessing. Take and drink. [*And we drink it.*]

### PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

Although we are apart, we thank you, God, for gathering us together at your table in spirit.  
Having been nourished and strengthened,  
may we continue the living of our lives filled with your uncontainable love  
that spills over to inspire us to acts of compassion for, and support of, all people,  
especially those who are victims of injustice, neglected, frightened, and oppressed.

Amen.

(some words inspired by Cara Heafey, UK, Lockdown Liturgy for Communion, Worshipwords)

CLOSING HYMN      *Lord, Help Me to Hold Out*      sung by The Detroit Mass Choir  
<https://youtu.be/bWazCDZI5co>

#### OUR COMMON COMMISSION

Let us now forth into the world in peace.  
Being of good courage.  
Holding fast to that which is good.  
Rendering to no one evil for evil.  
Strengthening the fainthearted.  
Supporting the weak.  
Helping the afflicted.  
Honoring all persons.  
Loving and serving the Lord,  
And rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

#### BENEDICTION

May peace surround you this day and in the days to come as followers of Christ,  
embracing a spirit of good will and moral sensitivity,  
May you be so committed to God's way  
that you will help to establish in your life and in this world  
a kingdom of understanding, where men and women will live together  
as brothers and sisters and respect the dignity and worth of every human being.  
Despite the unrest and misunderstanding that surrounds us, go forth with a renewed  
confidence in nonviolence and the way of love as taught by Christ. Amen.

(inspired by some words of The Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.)

POSTLUDE      *The Storm is Passing Over*      sung by The Detroit Mass Choir  
<https://youtu.be/d3jgPsGQSDQ>