

**Welcome to First Congregational Church United Church of Christ**  
**Seventeenth Sunday After Pentecost**  
**September 24, 2023**

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*\*\* Some rise to their feet, some rise in their hearts—please rise as you are able.*

GATHERING BELL

*At the sound of the bell, please silence yourselves and prepare for worship.*

PRELUDE

*Little Prelude and Fugue in G, J.S. Bach*

Ellen Bradley

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Rev. Paul Ashby

INVITATION TO WORSHIP

**Whoever you are...and wherever you are on life's journey...  
you are welcome here!**

OPENING REFLECTION

CALL TO WORSHIP

Andrea Bartlett

For the last 13 years federal minimum wage has remained at \$7.25.

**How can this be when we have suffered through Covid shutdowns, massive job losses  
and inflation impacting everything from eggs to autos?**

Give us hearts that feel the injustice of families who struggle just to have food and are one emergency away from eviction.

**Enable us to work for justice and mercy with the compassion of Jesus.**

But we live in a society that tells us to "don't help people who have not earned it... if they have not earned it, they don't deserve it!"

**May we seek a justice that hugs mercy, holds to empathy, and embraces compassion.**

\*\*HYMN 425

*For the Fruit of All Creation*

All

For the fruit of all creation, thanks be to God.

For God's gifts to every nation, thanks be to God.

For the plowing, sowing, reaping, silent growth while we are sleeping,

Future needs in earth's safe-keeping, thanks be to God.

In the just reward of labor, God's will is done.

In the help we give our neighbor, God's will is done.

In our worldwide task of caring for the hungry and despairing,

In the harvests we are sharing, God's will is done.

For the harvests of the Spirit, thanks be to God.

For the good we all inherit, thanks be to God.

For the wonders that astound us, for the truths that still confound us,

Most of all that love has found us, thanks be to God.

PASTORAL PRAYER AND LORD'S PRAYER

**Our Creator, who art in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your 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  
yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.**

INVITATION TO OFFERING

Andrea

OFFERTORY

*Heartsong Blessing, Stepanek/Martin*

Choir

**\*\*DOXOLOGY***Know That God is Good*

All

**Know that God is good. Know that God is good.  
Know that God is good. God is good. God is good.**

**Hal-le, hal-le-lu-jah. Hal-le, hal-le-lu-jah.  
Hal-le, hal-le-lu-jah. Hal-le-lu-jah. Hal-le-lu-jah.**

**\*\*PRAYER OF DEDICATION**

Andrea

**God of Mercy, use our gifts to energize the church to work for mercy in our community and our world. Let our gifts give voice to justice for all your children of every race and faith and yes, your children unable to feel faith about anything. Plant within us the longing for every family to be blessed. Amen**

**SCRIPTURE**

Matthew 20:1-16

Andrea

“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the laborers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. When he went out about nine o’clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace; and he said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ So they went. When he went out again about noon and about three o’clock, he did the same. And about five o’clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, ‘Why are you standing here idle all day?’ They said to him, ‘Because no one has hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard.’ When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, ‘Call the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first.’ When those hired about five o’clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, saying, ‘These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.’ But he replied to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?’ So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

**MESSAGE***“Is God Fair?”*

Paul

**\*\*HYMN NCH 23***There’s a Wideness in God’s Mercy*

All

There's a wideness in God's mercy, like the wideness of the sea.  
There's a kindness in God's justice, which is more than liberty.  
There is no place where earth's sorrows are more felt than in God's heaven.  
There is no place where earthly failings have such kindly judgment given.

For the love of God is broader than the measures of the mind.  
And the heart of the Eternal is most wonderfully kind.  
If our love were but more faithful, we would gladly trust God's word,  
and our lives would show thanksgiving for the goodness of our God.

**GOD RULES, A SUNDAY SCHOOL PRESENTATION**

Puppets purchased in memory of Betty Neff.

**\*\* SUNG BENEDICTION***World Peace Prayer*

All

Lead us from death to life, from falsehood to truth,  
From despair to hope, from fear to trust.  
Lead us from hate to love, from war to peace,  
Let peace fill our hearts, let peace fill our world,

Let peace fill our universe!

GREETING ONE ANOTHER IN THE SPIRIT OF LOVE

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**Today's Worship Leaders**

preacher  
liturgist  
musician

Rev. Dr. Paul Ashby  
Andrea Bartlett  
Ellen Bradley

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