

**Second Congregational Church in Newcastle, United Church of Christ  
Newcastle, Maine**

**The 6th Sunday After Pentecost  
Online Worship – July 12, 2020  
10:00 AM**



*I am a rose of Sharon,  
a lily of the valleys.”  
Song of Solomon 2:1*

**INVITATION**

Welcome to Virtual Worship with the community of Second Congregational Church in Newcastle, United Church of Christ in Newcastle, Maine. From our various spaces, on our various devices, we enter sacred time together. No matter who you are or where you are on life’s journey, you are welcome here. God meets us everywhere and in all our humanness. Be here in this sacred moment. God is with you. God is with us. May this worship of saints be blessed, be nourishing, be comforting, be church.

***PREPARING FOR WORSHIP:***

*As we gather, please be sure that your device (computer, phone or tablet) is in the mute mode to avoid feedback and background noise. You are encouraged to use the “chat” or “comment” features to offer prayer requests at any time during the service.*

*Before the time of the service you may want to prepare a simple worship space. Perhaps you can light a candle or have a Bible with you or set in place some other symbol of faith that brings you comfort. Perhaps an outdoor element – a flower, leaf or branch - helps you to spiritually focus. Perhaps you would like to include the photograph of someone you wish to bring into the circle of faith. Whatever it is, follow your heart.*

***Thank you for your preparation.  
Let us now be present to the Spirit  
which brings us together and loves us where we are!***

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**GATHERING MUSIC**

**“Storms of Passion”  
Peter Asche, Piano**

**Composed by Tim O’Neil**

**Link: [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1swj52absi5HihxuN7i76xR9Fp\\_vF\\_L0u/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1swj52absi5HihxuN7i76xR9Fp_vF_L0u/view?usp=sharing)**

**WELCOME & CENTERING MOMENT**

**CALL TO WORSHIP (from Ephesians 4:1-6):<sup>1</sup> (said aloud together but muted):**

God is calling us into a life worthy of God's love,  
With all humility and gentleness, may we bear with one another in love.  
May we worship in the unity of the Spirit, in the bond of peace;  
There is one body and one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism;  
One God of us all, who is above all, and through all, and in all;  
Come, let us worship our God, joined together in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

**OPENING HYMN 327**

**"I Was There to Hear Your Borning Cry"**

Waterlife

*(Music is pre-recorded by Peter Asche, with Jane Wilmot on organ and Peter on piano. We will remain muted to avoid audio feedback and lags. Please sing aloud at home or follow along as best as you are able. Remember, it's our spiritual intention that matters!).*

## I Was There to Hear Your Borning Cry



1. I was there to hear your born-ing cry, I'll be there when you are old.  
3. When you heard the won-der of the word I was there to cheer you on;  
5. In the mid - dle a - ges of your life, not too old, no long - er young.  
7. I was there to hear your born-ing cry, I'll be there when you are old.



I re - joiced the day you were bap-tized, to see your life un-fold.  
you were raised to praise the liv - ing God, to whom you now be-long.  
I'll be there to guide you through the night, com-plete what I've be-gun.  
I re - joiced the day you were bap-tised to see your life un-fold.



2. I was there when you were but a child, with a faith to suit you well;  
4. If you find some one to share your time and you join your hearts as one,  
6. When the eve - ning gent - ly clos - es in and you shut your wear - y eyes,



in a blaze of light you wan-dered off to find where de - mons dwell.  
I'll be there to make your vers - es rhyme from dusk till ris - ing sun.  
I'll be there as I have al - ways been with just one more sur - prise.

Link: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/19Y15eC45Stp-5kjI94KAGpipkpbSv8nt/view?usp=sharing>

<sup>1</sup> Call to Worship, 08/02/2015, written/adapted by Rev. Mindi Welton-Mitchell, rev-o-lution.org.

## SONG OF INVOCATION – (Sung together but muted;)

TAKE, O TAKE ME AS I AM

Ostinato Refrain

Take, O take me as I am; sum - mon out what I shall

be; set your seal up-on my heart and live in me.

Text: John L. Bell, b.1949  
Tune: John L. Bell, b.1949  
© 1995, The Iona Community, GIA Publications, Inc., agent

Link: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1DxNU9aTxbNwSr37xfN-6qo2BAZhF1fUJ/view?usp=sharing>

## THE LORD'S PRAYER (said out loud together but muted):

(Second Church follows the version of the Lord's Prayer that is offered below. However, you are invited to say this prayer aloud in the tradition that brings you the most comfort: debt/debtors; sins/sin; trespasses/trespass).

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.

**SCRIPTURE: The Song of Solomon 2:8-13**

**Reader: Laurie Chandler**

The voice of my beloved!

Look, he comes,  
leaping upon the mountains,  
bounding over the hills.

<sup>9</sup> My beloved is like a gazelle  
or a young stag.

Look, there he stands  
behind our wall,  
gazing in at the windows,  
looking through the lattice.

<sup>10</sup> My beloved speaks and says to me:

“Arise, my love, my fair one,  
and come away;

<sup>11</sup> for now the winter is past,  
the rain is over and gone.

<sup>12</sup> The flowers appear on the earth;  
the time of singing has come,  
and the voice of the turtledove  
is heard in our land.

<sup>13</sup> The fig tree puts forth its figs,  
and the vines are in blossom;  
they give forth fragrance.

Arise, my love, my fair one,  
and come away.

## **MEDITATION**

## **“Celebrating and Valuing Our Bodies”**

**Pastor Char Corbett**

*Prayer: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our minds and hearts gathered here this day be acceptable in your sight, Oh Lord, our Strength and our Redeemer. Amen.*

Today we are into our fifth week of a 10-week summer’s sermon series. We continue to tackle some hard conversations by engaging five Biblical books of the Old Testament that the Church tends to either forget or minimize: Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Song of Solomon, Ruth and Esther. The reason these books are largely ignored is because they bring forward difficult conversations about our lived humanity and where it intersects with, and often complicates, our faith. Over the last month we’ve visited the books of Ecclesiastes and Lamentations where we: held reflections about living in a world that is often beyond our control and understanding; that our seasons of living in-between living and dying are often messy and painful, yet meant to be enjoyed; and that human suffering can’t be avoided but that it is right to protest loudly, even against God, when the sufferings we witness or experience are unjust or overwhelming.

These are important conversations to be had, especially as we struggle in these unprecedented times with Covid-19, national political, cultural and religious polarization, the now global Black Lives Matter movement and the suffering we are witnessing or experiencing daily at home and in the news.

Today you may think we are taking a 360 degree turn as we bring our attention to the third book of our series, the Song of Solomon. You may wonder why we are going from spiritual and physical suffering to discussing the pure joy of our bodies. I assure you that not only are they connected but that having conversations about our bodies is a way of bringing health and wholeness to our faith and living.

Before I jump readily into this Old Testament book of erotic poetry however, there are two things that might be helpful for you to know about me and why I think the Song of Solomon is so relevant to our faithful living.

The first is that for most of my childhood and young adult life I struggled immensely with my own body image, to the point that I was anorexic before I was twelve years old. In my adulthood, it took over 15 years of therapy, nutrition classes, spiritual direction and prayer to overcome my self-loathing and to find healing.

***My body, your bodies, every body, is a temple to be honored and lovingly tended to, not shamed, abused or destroyed.***

Secondly, for 30 years I was a youth and family minister. Why is that important to know about me? Well, nothing surprises or embarrasses me anymore when it comes to conversations around sexuality! Also, my training for all ages in the UCC's *Our Whole Lives* sexuality curriculum has prepared me to talk with everyone and anyone in age-appropriate ways about sex, sexuality, gender identity, sexual orientation, mutuality and consent in all relationships, the health and illnesses of our bodies, the ableness each of our bodies have or don't have, the size of our bodies, the aging of our bodies and the mental health challenges we experience because of the multiple ways we see our bodies, harm or shame our bodies, how others treat our bodies and the cultural distortion and sexualization of our bodies.

So...bodies, bodies, bodies! More than we may care to admit, much of our thinking and our living centers around our bodies! Even our Christian theology does, as Jesus is the embodiment of God, in whom we are created in likeness. And God tells us that all of creation, even our bodies, are very good. Not just good, or good enough. But very good! And so, I believe the church needs to have open conversations about sexuality and all its diversity and relationships, as our bodies are and always will be part of our faith journey if we wish to be healthy and whole.

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So...what in the world is this book doing in the Bible?<sup>2</sup> The Song of Solomon, or as our Jewish brothers and sisters refer to it as, the Song of Songs, is one of the most controversial books of the Bible. For starters, God isn't mentioned at all in its eight chapters. Originally the ancient rabbis attempted to keep it out of the original canon and the verses Laurie read for us today are the only verses read during the Christian church's 3-year scripture cycle. Why? Well, because it's really intimate and personal and we don't like to be made uncomfortable!

This collection of poems is presented as a love song between a man and a woman and it's full of lush and sometimes erotic imagery that hardly seems appropriate as Holy Writ. The two young lovers, who may or may not be married, are experiencing the electrifying, intense early stage of love and they aren't shy about their longing and the joys of their physical relationship. The Song of Songs makes a Harlequin romance novel seem mild and tame in comparison. The book just doesn't seem to fit with the rest of scripture. Yet here it is in all its glory: "My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag....My beloved speaks and says to me, 'Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away'" (Song of Solomon 2:9, 10).

I'm not alone in thinking this is one of the most beautiful books of the Bible. In the age of the great Medieval Monastics, the Song was discussed more than any other Old Testament

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<sup>2</sup> [1] "What in the world is this doing in the Bible?" a commentary on [workingpreacher.org](http://workingpreacher.org) by [Kathryn Schifferdecker](#), Assistant Professor of Old Testament at Luther Seminary, in St. Paul, MN.

book. Bernard of Clairvaux, in the 1300s, wrote 86 sermons on the Song – and then, that only covered the first two chapters! (That made one modern preacher quip that if you ever want to take ALL the joy out of sex, just preach 86 sermons about it!)<sup>3</sup> Origen wrote homilies and a ten-volume commentary on it. The great teacher and mystic Rabbi Akiba also made the best case for the book when some ancient rabbis in the 1<sup>st</sup> century C.E. tried to ban it as no more than a raunchy drinking song. He said, "The whole world is not worth the day on which the Song of Songs was given to Israel, for all the Scriptures are holy, but the Song of Songs is the Holy of Holies."<sup>4</sup>

The Song of Solomon can be and has been looked upon in a variety of ways. Modern biblical and literature scholars embrace it as an example of exotic love poetry, much like the Arabic *wasf* poetry found in ancient literature. For centuries, the Jewish and Christian faiths have also interpreted the book as allegory, lifting up the relationship between God and the people of Israel or between Christ and the Christian Church.

Today I want to share with you how this poetic book invites us into conversation about the joys and importance of relationships that are intimate, mutually respectful and physically enjoyable. Next week we'll talk about its allegorical motifs and implications for the church.

What precisely is it that makes us uncomfortable with the Song of Songs? Is it that we don't understand the book? No, the problem is the exact opposite. We know exactly what the words in the Song of Songs means and we know all about the body parts mentioned. The male Lover describes his beloved's attributes, beginning with the feet and working his way up to her head. He speaks of his beloved's body parts that we don't typically talk about in church and then, like in Chapter 7, sensually says, "I will climb the palm tree and lay hold of its branches." We understand all too perfectly the metaphors he is using. And then she responds, "Come let us go into the vineyards and see whether the vines have budded; whether the grape blossoms have opened; and the pomegranates are in bloom. There I will give you my love." We know that she is speaking of a lot more than grape blossoms and pomegranates. This is more than a Sunday stroll at Boothbay Harbor's Coastal Botanical Gardens. There is something here that is sweeter than the grapes that produce wine. There is no doubt that this is an erotic passage, much like the rest of the chapters. As the author of the *"Five Forgotten Books of the Bible"* says, "this poetry will make you blush but it won't get you arrested."<sup>5</sup>

If we can overcome our nervous giggles and blushing, we see that at its core, the Song of Solomon is a celebration of human love. It consists primarily of the intimate dialogue between this pair of lovers. And the poetic scenes are connected by similar motifs and themes: passion, descriptions of physical beauty, memories of past encounters, and longing for the

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<sup>3</sup> "Reveling in Romance - Song of Songs 2:8-13"; in "Living by the Word" column, *Christian Century*, August 10, 1994, by Martin Copenhaver.

<sup>4</sup> Mishnah Yadayim 3:5

<sup>5</sup> Robert Williamson, Jr. "The Five Forgotten Books of the Bible: Recovering the Five Scrolls for Today." Fortress Press, 2018. p. 12.

lover's presence. It's about love that is marked by fidelity and mutuality. The lovers are faithful to each other. They have eyes for no one else: "My beloved is mine and I am his" (2:16; 6:3). "My vineyard [the woman], my very own, is for myself; / you, O Solomon, may have the thousand" (8:12).

The Song celebrates the beauty of faithful human love. For that reason alone the Song deserves a place in Scripture. In a culture saturated with abusive, pornographic and commercialized sexual images, this text celebrates the love between lovers that is private, mutually consented to and physically sensual.

This book also celebrates human sexuality as part of God's good creation. Today's text is a lovely reminder that our physical bodies are beautiful and beloved, and that loving relationships occur within and not in spite of our human bodies. The reading today began with the woman extolling the way the man moves in verse 8. Then she exclaims over the way he stands still and looks out the window in verse 9; she observes and enjoys every little thing he does.

The lover then asks his love to run away together; it does not appear that they are running away from anything or towards anything. They just want to be together. Often romping in the garden, the woman and man are in harmony with one another and with the natural world. The natural beauty of the world around them reflects their love: blossoming flowers, fruit-laden trees, singing birds. It's paradise. The natural world evokes all of the senses as does the love between the couple. The very physicality of this text as scripture is its gift. The lovers, their love and their world are all God's good, very good, creation. There is no division between body and soul.

Sadly and for centuries, the church has emphasized particular parts of scripture in order to say, "no" to the pleasures of sex and our bodies, insisting that our bodies and our natural physical desires are sinful. Yet surely, don't we all crave relationships that are so mutually intimate and satisfying that they draw us out of ourselves and more deeply into the passions of life? Relationships in which pleasure is given and received with joy. Relationships in which knowledge of the body is sought with care and gentleness and our bodies are pronounced beautiful over and over again?

If we can come to experience the body as sacred, we can begin to know ourselves as holy and others as holy. With this wholistic and mutually appreciative approach we are then more readily able to care for one another for our common well-being. When we recognize the face of the HOLY ONE in the faces of our neighbors, the face of our lover and in our own face, we can begin to feel at ease in our bodies.

On June 26<sup>th</sup>, we celebrated the 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Equality in Marriage Act in the United States, which legalized the marriages of same-sex couples. Every day we are learning new understandings and terms of sexual orientation, gender identity and the self expression of our bodies. Currently our country and the world over are wrestling with the deep history and injustices of racism and white privilege. At Second Church, we are coming to terms with the age and mobility issues of our community as we plan to make our front entrance more

assessable. All these matters are about how we view, experience, treat, acknowledge and care for our bodies and the bodies of our neighbors, the ones we are called to love just as we love ourselves. It's time for us to dismantle the shame and stigmas of all bodies and to embrace the very good creation of who we are in all the ways, shapes, colors, races and identities that God has blessed us and created us with. Our bodies are to be loved and treated as sacred. In closing, I offer this adapted prayer, originally written by Rev. Dr. Dan De Leon<sup>6</sup>, who was inspired by Chapter 1 of Song of Songs:

*I am black AND beautiful.*

*I am gay AND Christian.*

*I am undocumented AND a human being.*

*I am differently-abled AND essential to the community.*

*I am trans AND undeniable.*

*I am a woman AND powerful by the Spirit of God.*

*I am a teenager AND I am the church.*

*I am poor AND I am blessed.*

*I am meek AND I will inherit the earth.*

*I am old AND I am worthy and valued.*

*I am a peacemaker AND I will be called a child of God.*

*Made in God's likeness, I am beautiful AND I am LOVE. Amen.*

## **MUSIC**

“My Jesus I Love Thee”

arr. by Mary McDonald

*Peter Asche, organ; Jane Wilmot, piano*

Link: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1mHhgFpMBQivof8Y70gBnEZf-dV32Qqsg/view?usp=sharing>

## **SILENT PRAYERS AND PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE**

*[NOTE: You are invited to type your prayer requests in the “Chat” or “Comment” features of your online device or to name those you pray for aloud in your own sacred space. PLEASE BE PRUDENT and do not share last names or specific, sensitive information on on-line platforms, as we can unknowingly increase an individual's vulnerability in our stated care].*

Loving God, the Biblical psalm 139 reminds us that “You formed our inward parts; You covered us in our mothers’ wombs” and that “we will praise You, for we are fearfully and wonderfully made.” As we try to live into these words, we pray that we would stop trying to grasp bodily perfection and instead focus on being good stewards of the bodily temples You have given us. May our flaws and scars not defeat us, but rather, add to the joy and hope of living in You. We pray You will help us see where You find beauty and teach us to do the same. God, help us not only to be content with our bodies, but to CELEBRATE them - the differences, the flaws, the imperfections, the beauty and the unique characteristics. You have taught us that one of the greatest commandments to live by is that of loving others the way we love ourselves. Therefore, teach us the language and practices of self-care and self-respect so we may live with dignity and treat others with compassion and kindness, as we are all made in your image.

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<sup>6</sup> **Disconnecting and Reengaging: The Subversive Power of Sabbath Rest.** Posted 2017 by Rev. Dr. Dan De Leon. Visited <http://www.friends-ucc.org/wordpress/?p=3211> on July 8, 2020.



God of passion and joy, we do so many things with our bodies. We do bold things, we do simple things, we do wise things, we do natural things and sometimes we do really silly things. Please help us to also use these bodies to worship you wildly. Remind us to fall on our knees in prayer. Help us to wave our arms for help or in praise. Help us to move in our bodies in ways that celebrate life passionately. Guide us to fill ourselves in ways that bring nourishment to our bodies and souls. Bless our bodies when they need healing.

God of love, help us to accept that with each day our temporal bodies age, slow down and ache a little more. When we look in the mirror and see the changes in our appearance, help us to know that each wrinkle, every laugh line, and all of our gray hair, or the loss of it, is a mark of our faithful living in you. Remind us that these changes represent our lived lives and a deeper wisdom. Help us not to dread getting older, but to embrace each season and to accept new physical limitations that come with age. Instead of becoming bitter for what we can no longer do, may we seek new ways to move our bodies and flourish with vibrant spirits, fully serving you and our neighbors as best as we are able until the day you call us home.

Finally, O God, may we never stop expanding the perimeters of love and acceptance for all people. Help us to love those who are embodied in bodies unlike our own. Expand our notions of love to include all, including black, brown, indigenous and queer bodies and bodies shaped unlike our own. Continue to also soften our hearts to welcome people of all sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions, in all of the bodies in which they encompass. Creator God, we marvel in awe of the expansiveness of your creation. Your margins of diversity are boundless, and for that, we thank you. Every body is beautifully and wonderfully made, all in Your image. Teach us to love people, just as they are, and embrace their identity fully, as you have embraced us.

We continue to pray by offering the joys and concerns of our hearts...

### **BLESSING OF GIFTS RECEIVED AND GIVEN<sup>7</sup> (Pastor Char):**

Let us take this moment to reflect on the tangible and intangible gifts we have received from God and others this week and the ways in which we have shared our gifts of love, support, care, time and resources with others... (Silent Reflection).

*Church members, friends and visitors are invited to continue their pledges or to give freely to Second Church's ministries by going to our website, [www.secondcongo.org](http://www.secondcongo.org) and making a donation through Givelify or Pay Pal. Checks payable to Second Congregational Church can also be mailed to Second Congregational Church UCC, PO Box 243, Newcastle, ME 04553.*

### **DOXOLOGY:**

***Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;  
Praise God, all creatures here below;  
Praise God, for all that love has done  
Creator, Christ and Spirit, One. Amen.***

**Link:** [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1i\\_rsV2do4xe1-ja\\_rWLePPj6W6Y-jV9-/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1i_rsV2do4xe1-ja_rWLePPj6W6Y-jV9-/view?usp=sharing)

### **PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING: (Said out loud together, but muted):**

**Thank you, God, for the opportunity to share in your ministry of peace and healing for the world. Because you have blessed us, we have much to give. Our offerings express our gratitude and our hope that all who give and receive will know your joy. Amen.**

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<sup>7</sup> Prayer of Blessings and Thanksgiving have been written by Rev. Char Corbett, 6/23/2020.

## CLOSING HYMN 390

“When Love Is Found”

O Waly Waly (NEXT PAGE)

(Music is pre-recorded by Peter Asche, with Jane Wilmot on organ and Peter on piano. We will remain muted to avoid audio feedback and lags. Please sing aloud at home or follow along as best as you are able. Remember, it's our spiritual intention that matters!).

## BENEDICTION

Created in Love, blessed with Love and empowered by Love, may we go in peace to love and serve the Lord. In the name of Christ. Amen.

## VIRTUAL COFFEE HOUR CHECK IN (ZOOM ONLY)

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*Today's Worship has been prepared, sent out, offered and led by:*

- ▶ **Peter Asche**, Music Assistant and “Second Singers’ Technical Mixologist
- ▶ **Bill Bausch**, Communications & Technology Support; Snippets Meister
- ▶ **Laurie Chandler**, Scripture Reader
- ▶ **Rev. Char Corbett**, Pastor
- ▶ **Jim Corbett**, Videographer, Zoom and Facebook Live Host
- ▶ **Carole Blanton**, Altar Arrangement
- ▶ **Jane Wilmot**, Minister of Music

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## When Love Is Found

1. When love is found and hope comes home,  
2. When love has flowered in trust and care,  
3. When love is tried as loved ones change,  
4. When love is torn, and trust be - trayed,  
5. Praise God for love, praise God for life,

sing and be glad that two are — one.  
build both each day, that love may dare  
hold still to hope, though all seems strange,  
pray strength to love till tor - ments fade,  
in age or youth, in calm or — strife.

When love ex - plodes and fills the — sky,  
to reach be - yond home's warmth and — light,  
till ease re - turns and love grows wise  
till lov - ers keep no score of — wrong,  
Lift up your hearts! Let love be — fed

praise God, and share our Mak - ers joy.  
to serve and strive for truth and right.  
through lis - tening ears and o - pened eyes.  
but hear through pain love's Eas - ter song.  
through death and life in bro - ken bread.

WORDS: Brian Wren, 1978, rev. 1992  
MUSIC: Traditional English melody

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Link: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1axAggmUYwPFWY8Kv6BpWoSIWPGxeqPd1/view?usp=sharing>