Welcome to First Congregational Church



The Two Disciples at the Tomb, 1906

Henry Ossawa Tanner (1859–1937),

This painting depicts the moment when Peter and John arrive at Christ's empty tomb. The son of a prominent minister of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, Tanner was perhaps the most renowned American painter of religious works at the turn of the 20th century. After studying at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Tanner moved to France in an effort to escape the racism that limited his career in the United States.
(Art Institute of Chicago)

ANNOUCEMENTS

*[Please send any announcements for the bulletin or weekly Enews to the Secretary (secretary@concordsfirstchurch.org) by **9am Thursday morning**. Please include the exact wording of*

SAVE THE DATES:

Regathering Sunday: On Sunday, September 13, we invite you to join us as we begin a new program year and regather after our summer season of rest. Following worship, we'll share coffee hour in the Parlor, across the hall from the Chapel. If you would like to bring something to share, please contact a member of Spiritual Life: Kellie Heath, Eleanor Kimball, Brenda Placenti, or Sheila Swenson.

Tending Our History/Turning 300: Beginning Monday, September 14, from 11:00–12:30, Spiritual Life and Pastor Emilia invite you to a monthly gathering as we begin exploring the archival treasures currently stored in Pembroke. Each month, we'll tackle three boxes, one for each member of the Trinity! Together, we'll decide what to donate to the Congregational Library & Archives in Boston, what to keep as we approach our 300th anniversary, and what can be recycled. Afterward, we'll enjoy fellowship over brown-bag lunches.

Circle Gatherings for 2026/2027: Beginning Sunday, September 27, and continuing on most fourth Sundays through May, we will gather *after* worship from approximately 11:45–12:45 for conversation and shared discernment. As we approach our 300th anniversary, our gatherings will center around one important question: *How is God calling us to live with intention into the next season of life as First Congregational Church of Concord?*

Outreach: Save the Date: October 10th – Crop Walk
We received a thank you from CWS for our support of the kits program. The note is posted on the bulletin board outside the chapel.
Please continue to support this effort. We have two more completed kid kits to make a grand total of 34. We still need to take advantage of the back to school sales. Please do so by buying:
Glue sticks
24 count crayons
12 count crayons
12 count colored pencils
blunt, rounded tip scissors
12"/30 cm rulers
unsharpened pencils
Please also buy items needed for the Clean up Bucket.

Welcome to First Congregational Church
An Open and Affirming Congregation of the United Church of Christ
Rev. Emilia Halstead
August 23, 2026

Welcome & Announcements

PRELUDE O Splendor of God's Glory Bright Annie Papinsick

SETTING OUR INTENTIONS FOR WORSHIP

CALL TO WORSHIP: (Created by Pastor Emilia using ChatGPT)
Surely God is in this place.
And sometimes we do not know it.
God is present in the music and in the silence,
In the words we speak and in the mysteries too deep for words.
God is present in those gathered beside us,
And in the communion of love that reaches beyond what our eyes can see.
When the world around us trembles and roars, God whispers,
"Be still, and know that I am God."
When fear closes the doors of our hearts, Christ comes among us saying,
"Peace be with you."
Beloved, awaken to the Holy for Jesus said,
"Wherever two or three are gathered, I am there."
Surely God is in this place.
Let us worship the Divine together.

COMING INTO THE INVISIBLE EMBRACE OF BEAUTY (Created by Pastor Emilia using ChatGPT)
Holy One of Silence and Mystery:
remind us that we are held within a communion greater than anything we can see, a great circle of belonging in which nothing loved by you is ever finally lost.
Come among us, Prince of Peace:
Stand within the locked rooms of our hearts and breathe upon us again.
May we leave this place able to say with Jacob:
Surely God was here, and now we have begun to notice. Amen.

OFFERING OUR MOMENTS OF BEAUTY & PRAYERS OF JOY
(*Response to each offering/prayer:*)
O Love of our hearts,
Receive our praise.

OPENING SONG: #277 Holy, Holy, Holy (Public Domain)

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!
Early in the morning we praise your majesty.
Holy, holy, holy! merciful and mighty!
God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!

Continued on next page

Holy, holy, holy! All the saints adore you truly.
Casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea;
Cherubim and seraphim bow before you only
From the beginning, God eternally.

Holy, holy, holy! Though we know but dimly,
Through the eyes of humankind your glory may not see,
You alone are holy, you alone are worthy,
Perfect in power, in love and purity.

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!
All your works shall praise your name, in earth and sky and sea;
Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and mighty!
God in three Persons, blessed Trinity.

Hear now from the book of Genesis in which Jacob hasn't traveled to a temple. He has simply stumbled into a sacred presence. The holy was already there. His Awakening did not summon God; it allowed him to notice God…
Hebrew Scriptures Genesis 28:10–12,16-17 (the Message translation) Jim Wildman

Jacob left Beersheba and went to Haran. He came to a certain place and camped for the night since the sun had set. He took one of the stones there, set it under his head and lay down to sleep. And he dreamed: A stairway was set on the ground and it reached all the way to the sky; angels of God were going up and going down on it.
[When] Jacob woke up from his dream he said, "God is in this place—truly. And I didn't even know it!" He was terrified. He whispered in awe, "Incredible. Wonderful. Holy. This is God's House. This is the Gate of Heaven."
Here ends the Lesson.
Amen.

Let us share now from the Psalms, using a womanist adaptation which pushes back against the empire's obsession with armies and ruling powers, as well as the notion that Divine energy is only masculine energy…
Hebrew Scriptures Psalm 46 (Created by Pastor Emilia using ChatGPT) Jim Wildman

God is our refuge and our strength, a shelter that does not fail us, a very present help when trouble comes. So we will not surrender to fear,
even when the ground beneath us shifts,
even when the world we have known falls apart,
even when mountains tumble into restless seas,
and the waters rage and roar, shaking everything we thought was secure.
Still, we will not be moved. There is a river whose waters bring life, flowing through the dwelling place of the Holy.
God is right there, in the heart of her people, and they will not be abandoned. When morning comes, God will be there.

Continued on next page

Nations rage. Empires tremble. Powers rise believing they will last forever. But the Holy One speaks, and the earth remembers who truly holds creation.
The God of our mothers and grandmothers is with us.
The God who carried our ancestors through impossible nights is still our refuge. Come and see what God is doing.
See how the Holy One interrupts the machinery of destruction, how she breaks the weapons of war, shatters the instruments of oppression, and burns away everything fashioned for death.
Then, beneath all the noise, God speaks: "Be still. Release what you cannot carry. Remember who I am. I am God. I will rise above every empire, every power, every force that diminishes life. My glory will fill the earth."
The God of our mothers and grandmothers is with us.
The God who heard our ancestors sing in the darkness, who kept hope alive when hope seemed foolish, who made a way when there appeared to be no way,
***That* God is still our refuge.**
Here ends the Lesson.
Amen.

Let us share together from the Gospel of John, in which the risen Christ appears quietly in a locked room. The boundary between absence and presence, death and life, suddenly becomes porous…
Gospel Lesson John 20:19-29 (the Voice translation) Jim Wildman

[Narrator] On that same evening (Resurrection Sunday), the followers gathered together behind locked doors in fear that some of the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem were still searching for them. Out of nowhere, Jesus appeared in the center of the room.

Jesus [Pastor Emilia]: May each one of you be at peace.

[Narrator] As He was speaking, He revealed the wounds in His hands and side. The disciples began to celebrate as it sank in that they were really seeing the Lord.

Jesus [Pastor Emilia]: I give you the gift of peace. In the same way the Father sent Me, I am now sending you.

[Narrator] Now He drew close enough to each of them that they could feel His breath. He breathed on them:

Jesus [Pastor Emilia]: Welcome the Holy Spirit of the living God. You now have the mantle of God's forgiveness. As you go, you are able to share the life-giving power to forgive sins, or to withhold forgiveness.

All of the eleven were present with the exception of Thomas. He heard the accounts of each brother's interaction with the Lord. The other disciples told Thomas, "We have seen the Lord!"

Thomas: **Until I see His hands, feel the wounds of the nails, and put my hand to His side, I won't believe what you are saying.**

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[Narrator] Eight days later, they gathered again behind locked doors; and Jesus reappeared. This time Thomas was with them.

Jesus [Pastor Emilia]: May each one of you be at peace. Thomas, reach out and touch Me. See the punctures in My hands; reach out your hand, and put it to My side; leave behind your faithlessness, and believe.

Thomas: **You are the one True God and Lord of my life.**

Jesus [Pastor Emilia]: Thomas, you have faith because you have seen Me. Blessed are all those who never see Me and yet they still believe.
Here ends the Lesson.
Amen.

SERMON "The Sanctuary of Subtle Presence" Rev. Emilia Halstead

PAUSING FOR MOMENT OF SILENT REFLECTION

SONG: #488 Be Still, My Soul (Public Domain)

Be still, my soul: for God is on your side;
Bear patiently the cross of grief or pain.
Leave to your God to order and provide;
In every change, God faithful will remain.
Be still, my soul: your best eternal friend
Through thorny ways leads to a joyful end.

Be still, my soul: for God will undertake
To guide in future days as in the past.
Your hope, your confidence let nothing shake;
All now mysterious shall be clear at last.
Be still, my soul: the waves and winds still know
How Jesus' power ruled them long ago.

Be still, my soul: the hour will soon be here
When we shall be with God whom we adore.
With disappointment gone, no grief nor fear,
Sorrow replaced with joy forevermore.
Be still, my soul: when change and tears are past
All safe and blessèd we shall meet at last.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE - MOVING PAIN TO POSSIBILITY
(*Response to each prayer:*)
Divine Attraction,
Receive our prayers.

PASTORAL PRAYER (created by Pastor Emilia using ChatGPT)

Lord's Prayer:
Our Father, which 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, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

Sung Amen: O Love That Will Not Let Me Go, verse 1 (Public Domain)

O Love that will not let me go,
I rest my weary soul in you;
I give you back the life I owe.
That in your ocean depths its flow may swell ardor true.

Offertory

GLOBAL MINISTRIES WEEKLY PRAYERS: ECUADOR
(Written by Global Ministries staff)

MISSION MOMENT FROM ECUADOR

PRAYERS WITH ECUADOR
We sense the presence of the Great I Am in the warmth of the people, the innocence of the children, and the natural world, all manifesting God's greatness, power, and sovereignty over Ecuador.
Lord, we thank You for all the blessings received and for those yet to come. Hear, O Lord, our petitions:
We pray for the sick who lack the financial resources needed to access medicine and medical care.
We pray for mothers and fathers who have lost their jobs and face the difficult responsibility of supporting their families.
We acknowledge that You are the Son of the living God and that You have the power to grant wisdom to our country's leaders, so that they may seek the nation's well-being and promote a peace based on justice for all.
We give You thanks for the people who support FEDICE, enabling us to serve, walk alongside, and encourage families to move forward. Their passion and commitment make it possible to fulfill the mission of the Kingdom of God and His justice. Amen.

INVITATION TO GIVE (created by Pastor Emilia using ChatGPT)

GRATITUDE MUSIC Steal Away Annie Papinsick

PRAYER OF DEDICATION (created by Pastor Emilia using ChatGPT)

Holy One, receive these gifts and receive the love with which they are given. Use them to make your presence known in ways both visible and subtle. May they become welcome, healing, justice, beauty, shelter, and peace. And may our lives become offerings as well, quietly bearing your Love into the world. Amen.

CLOSING SONG: #436 God of Grace and Glory (Public Domain)

God of grace and God of glory, on your people pour Your power;
Crown your ancient church's story; bring its bud to glorious flower.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, for the facing of this hour,
For the facing of this hour.

From the evils that surround us, and assail the Savior's ways,
From the fears that long have bound us; free our hearts
for faith and praise. Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,
For the living of these days, for the living of these days.

Cure Your children's warring madness, bend our pride to your control;
Shame our reckless, selfish gladness, rich in things and poor in soul.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, make our broken spirits whole,
Make our broken spirits whole.

Set our feet on lofty places; gird our lives that they may be
Armored with all Christ-like graces, in the fight to set us free,
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, in the quest for liberty,
In the quest for liberty.

Save us from weak resignation; to the evils we deplore;
Let the search for your salvation be our glory evermore.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, serving you whom we adore,
Serving you whom we adore.

SETTING OUR INTENTIONS FOR THE WEEK AHEAD

GREATEST COMMANDMENT

BENEDICTION & SENDING (created by Pastor Emilia using ChatGPT)

POSTLUDE Lord, I Want to Be a Christian Annie Papinsick