

Hot Water

Isaiah 49:1 Listen to Me, O islands, And pay attention, you peoples from afar. The LORD called Me from the womb; From the body of My mother He named Me. 2 He has made My mouth like a sharp sword, In the shadow of His hand He has concealed Me; And He has also made Me a select arrow, He has hidden Me in His quiver. 3 He said to Me, "You are My Servant, Israel, In Whom I will show My glory." 4 But I said, "I have toiled in vain, I have spent My strength for nothing and vanity; Yet surely the justice *due* to Me is with the LORD, And My reward with My God." 5 And now says the LORD, who formed Me from the womb to be His Servant, To bring Jacob back to Him, so that Israel might be gathered to Him (For I am honored in the sight of the LORD, And My God is My strength), 6 He says, "It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also make You a light of the nations So that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth." 7 Thus says the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel *and* its Holy One, To the despised One, To the One abhorred by the nation, To the Servant of rulers, "Kings will see and arise, Princes will also bow down, Because of the LORD who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel who has chosen You."

John 1:29 The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! 30 "This is He on behalf of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.' 31 "I did not recognize Him, but so that He might be manifested to Israel, I came baptizing in water." 32 John testified saying, "I have seen the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him. 33 "I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, 'He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.' 34 "I myself have seen, and have testified that this is the Son of God." 35 Again the next day John was standing with two of his disciples, 36 and he looked at Jesus as He walked, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" 37 The two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. 38 And Jesus turned and saw them following, and said to them, "What do you seek?" They said to Him, "Rabbi (which translated means Teacher), where are You staying?" 39 He said to them, "Come, and you will see." So they came and saw where He was staying; and they stayed with Him that day, for it was about the tenth hour. 40 One of the two who heard John *speak* and followed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. 41 He found first his own brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah " (which translated means Christ). 42 He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon the son of John; you shall be called Cephas " (which is translated Peter).

Loving Creator shine as a light before me that you may be seen and not I.
Give me words that I may speak give us ears that we may hear and through
your Holy Spirit help us understand.

Amen.

If you have been behind the table at fellowship when I come through you
may know that I generally drink tea. This is not because I don't like coffee
but sometimes coffee doesn't like me. So I usually drink decaf tea.

If you are a tea drinker you may be able to relate to this, and even if you
coffee drinkers stretch it you may relate as well.

When I was in seminary, I ate at the school cafeteria often. The first time I
went up to get myself a cup of tea I found the selection they had were all
Bigelow teas; I usually drink Twinning's or some other brand but not
Bigelow.

They did have Earl Grey, one of my favorites. It looked good, the tea bag
smelled good, and then I put it in a cup and poured the hot water. It looked
like tea.

As I said recently, the proof of the pudding is in the eating, and when I
tasted the tea I was disappointed. I like a really strong cup of tea, particularly
with the pecan pie I was having for dessert.

What I learned is that you never know how strong your tea will be till you
put it in some hot water.

All of you have tea bags. All kinds of tea. Maybe you know what your tea is
like but chances are you don't. The only way to find out what your tea is like
is to put it in some hot water.

Last week I talked about Jesus and our baptism. Jesus calls us into the
muddy waters to join him.

This week in our Gospel reading John is proclaiming Jesus to be the One.
Jesus is the promised one.

Simon the son of John was brought to Jesus and Jesus gives him a new name
Peter.

Peter in Greek means stone or boulder or rock.

In earlier days this name may have meant thick headed as Peter seems unable to figure things out. It is Peter who tries to walk on the water and starts to sink, it is Peter who wants to build tabernacles at the transfiguration , it is Peter who is always the hotheaded one . Peter was always getting himself in hot water.

Following the crucifixion, Peter's name may have meant cold as a stone as Peter denies his Lord and teacher.

By the time we get to Pentecost, Peter was transformed into solid as a rock.

While Peter was tried and tested, in the end the name Jesus gave him was appropriate because, faced with challenges and difficulties , when put in some hot water, he became as strong as he could be.

I said a few weeks ago that we are living in a Post-Christian world, we as Christians are not the ones setting the standards in our society, people now have many choices and being Christian is just one possibility among many today. Old First Church in Springfield has had their last worship service after 370 years of ministry.

The mainline churches have lost half their membership in the past 40 years. I hear people talk about the First Church of Monson when 100 children were in the Sunday school. But those kids have not remained connected like they once did. There are so many options today.

We are having a wake-up call in the church, not just at First Church but at almost every church: we are in hot water.

Old First Church looked like many other churches on the edge just a few years ago and yet they were not able to survive in today's world.

Last week the Church Council met to discuss our budget for this year, and, without going into details, we may not even be able to keep our ministries going at the same level as last year. Each year the committees request the funds they feel they need to provide the programs we need to be a church. For the past several years most of the funding for programs was not available.

The budgets we have passed each year, while balanced, did not fund much more than the bare minimum, we do not fund all of the requests, we must pick and choose what we keep and what we don't.

We will need to have a long conversation as a church about how we address the issue of funding our ministries.

We are in hot water.

Even if we can fund the basics like heat, electric and a pastor, we will not be doing much to fund our ministries.

What we need in First Church is a common vision, a common direction.

Last week I talked about our baptismal vows and how they hold us together? Since the early days of Christianity that has been the basis of following Jesus. Perhaps they might help us find a common vision.

In our baptism and confirmation we said:

Jesus Christ is our Lord and Savior.
We promise to be Christ's disciple,
to follow in the way of our savior,
to show love and justice and to witness to the work and word of Jesus Christ.

This sounds like a good place to begin building a vision
Jesus is our Lord and savior.
We should follow him and continue his work in the world.

There are other vows in baptism:
We promise to grow in the Christian faith and to be a faithful member of the Church of Jesus Christ,
to celebrate Christ's presence and
to further Christ's mission in all the world?

I hope we can all say that is a good starting point for agreement.

Our baptism does hold us together as one and it does give us vision.

First Church does many of these things through our ministries and through our giving of time talent and treasure.

We have lots of ministries like Nomads and VBS and Habitat for Humanity.

We do lots of things to benefit the community like hosting the dances and game nights through the Nomads. We help with fuel to keep people warm when there is an emergency. We provide food for the hungry and clothe those in need.

We provide the opportunity for Christian worship.

And our ministries are not often as visible as when a funeral director calls and says that someone wants a minister for a Christian burial, I am able to go and do that , on your behalf, as an outreach from First Church, as an outreach from the Church of Jesus Christ.

What concerns me and has been haunting me since hearing of the closure of Old First is the realization that that can happen anywhere if we do not act as one body.

What happens if First Church cuts programs out and attracts fewer people and then we cut more and have fewer people to come and worship in this beautiful old church? What happens to the Nomads? Or the Habitat builds? Or the Prayer shawls? Or the Sunday school?

Each person who comes to First Church comes for a variety of reasons,
Some people come to worship and feel closer to God,
Some come to work for peace, justice and equality,
some come to share in community,
Some come for reasons I don't know
Most come for some combination of reasons,
but we all come because in Jesus we find something that calls us to follow.

Perhaps you heard John saying he's the One!
Perhaps you had an encounter with God's healing touch.
Perhaps you came because God tugged at your heart.
Perhaps someone dragged you to church one day to hear the story, and when you found God's love and grace, you were changed.

Perhaps you were born and bred in the church and you can't imagine being anywhere else.

Whatever your reason or reasons, you are here.

We are part of this church because God has brought us here, and, like Peter, we are called to follow. Like Peter we may find ourselves being a bit thick headed and getting ourselves in hot water.

Remember that a tea bag and a Christian are similar in that you never know how strong they are till you put them in some hot water.

We may be in some hot water, but it is probably not the first time, and it probably won't be the last. Jesus was in hot water throughout his ministry and in the end he allowed himself to be sacrificed for us.

Talk about hot water. Jesus gave us a challenging example. When faced with evil, Jesus did not back off, when put in hot water Jesus did not hesitate, he waded in and called us to follow him in.

He asks us to join him as disciples, as followers.

Yes we are in some hot water, but we should expect that as Jesus followers, the question is what do we do about it?

Do we give in to fear, or do we come together with a purpose?

This is an amazing community, diverse, dynamic and talented. This could be a euphemism for difficult or challenging.

But First Church has a strong history of being a witness to the Good News of Jesus Christ. We are approaching a 250 year anniversary in 2012 and it would be wonderful to see First Church thriving and well four years from now.

We are in hot water and how strong we are is yet to be seen.

I love Psalm 27 The LORD is my light and my salvation; Whom shall I fear? The LORD is the defense of my life; Whom shall I dread?

Too often we see the trees and miss the forest.

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. began his ministry at the very time that the civil rights of African Americans was becoming an issue. He was thrust into the forefront of the movement.

Early in his days in Montgomery, Alabama King was faced with a challenge. He had been preaching equality and stirring people up and one night his house was firebombed. After checking on his family he spoke to the crowd that had gathered. They were angry, they wanted to do something, they wanted to respond.

Talk about hot water.

Standing there in the ruins of his home, he told the people that they would not use their enemies tactics, violence and revenge would never help. Only the love and light of Jesus Christ could change the situation. It was all of them joining together under the banner of love and reconciliation that would make it possible.

One thing that King knew was that alone we are no match for the powers and principalities, but together, with God's help, with the teachings of Jesus, with the Holy Spirit there is nothing we can't do.

Faced with tremendous odds, with all the system of segregation stacked against the civil rights movement, they bound themselves together as one body for a purpose.

We celebrate King's work to bring about equality. His dream has changed the world, but that is only true because others joined him.

And the work continues, he was only picking up the work of Jesus Christ, the work he took up in his baptism to witness to the work and Word of Jesus Christ.

Jesus calls us to join him in the muddy waters of life

Generations of people have pledged themselves to this church and worked to keep it strong and vital. We are yet another chapter in the life of this church

and it is up to all of us to keep this church strong and healthy for another generation.

The world is becoming ever more challenging and our children will need the Good news of Jesus Christ to see them through, they will need the salvation we have come to cherish and for that to happen we need to come together as one body, as one body with all its parts working together.

We are in hot water, but Jesus is here with us.

We do face challenges; we are in hot water, but that is right where we should be. Jesus, Peter, Paul, Martin Luther King Jr and lots of people in between have been in hot water for proclaiming God's message of love and grace and forgiveness. We are in good company.

As Paul says, **If God is for us, who is against us?**

That is the thing that can be difficult to remember when we look at the challenges. Remember the Psalmist says:

The LORD is my light and my salvation; Whom shall I fear? The LORD is the defense of my life; Whom shall I dread?

Thanks be to God.
AMEN.

Good morning

Subs

Hearts willing

Annual meeting

Membership class