

September 3, 2023~ 11:00 a.m.

First Congregational UCC ~ Sarasota



We are surrounded by a great cloud of
WITNESSES."

Flowers given by **Katie Stewart**

PRELUDE

All Things Bright and Beautiful

John Rutter

Cynthia Roberts-Greene, guest pianist & Choir Director

INVITATION to WORSHIP

Written by Dale Moore

One: Good morning, Lord, here I am,

All: Standing in your presence, just as I am.

One: Lord, you know I'm not perfect.

All: But then I know you're not done with me yet.

One: Where I have been weak

All: The power of the Holy Spirit can make me strong.

One: Where I have been doubting

All: Your understanding of me will encourage my faith.

One: And where I have been apathetic,

All: Your Son's example on earth will give me a mission. So, God, I stand here this morning eagerly waiting to be filled with your spirit and love and prepared for my calling.

*OPENING HYMN

O Grant Us, God, a Little Space

O grant us, God, a little space from daily tasks set free. We meet within this holy place and find security.

Around us rolls the ceaseless tide of business, toil, and care, And scarcely can we turn aside for one brief hour of prayer.

Yet this is not the only place your presence may be found; On daily work you shed your grace, and blessings all around.

Yours are the workplace, home, and mart, the wealth of sea and land; The worlds of science and of art are fashioned by your hand.

Work shall be prayer, if all be wrought as you would have it done; And prayer, by you inspired and taught, shall then with work be one.

*OPENING PRAYER

Surround us, O God, with a peace, presence, promise, and possibility as we begin a new month. Sustain us, O God, with a strength to weather the storms and an openness to Your calming grace and love. Awaken us to the truth that faithfulness, justice, courage, and love are always the road less traveled. For our ancestors who sang spirituals of Your liberating love, we give thanks. For people who poured out their love *into* us, stood in solidarity *with* us, and kindled the spark *within* us to let our light shine, we celebrate with the great cloud of witnesses this morning. For all the saints, God, help me to be one too. Alleluia and Amen.

*RESPONSE

I Sing a Song of the Saints of God

I sing a song of the saints of God faithful their whole lives through, who bravely labored, lived, and died for the God they loved and knew. And one was a doctor, and one was a queen, and another a shepherd in pastures green: they were saints of God, if you know what I mean. God help me to be one, too.

ENGAGING SCRIPTURE

Hebrew 12

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, ²looking to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

SERMON

A Stew of Witnesses

OFFERING/ANTHEM

We Are Surrounded

Joseph Martin

CELEBRATION OF HOLY COMMUNION

One: God, You labor in love, joy, hope, and justice. God call us to be collaborators and co-workers with You.

One: May God who is still at work in the world and your life be with you.

Many: And also with you.

One: Come to the table of grace,

Many: With anticipation we gather and link arms as siblings.

One: It is good to gather as God's people here,

Many: For we are all the body of Christ woven together with threads of love.

PASTORAL PRAYER and LORD'S PRAYER

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.

*CLOSING HYMN

Take My Gifts

Take my gifts and let me love you, God who first of all loved me, gave me light and food and shelter, gave me life and set me free, now because your love has touched me, I have love to give away, now the bread of love is rising, loaves of love to multiply!

Take the fruit that I have gathered from the tree your Spirit sowed, harvest of your own compassion, juice that makes the wine of God, spiced with humor, laced with laughter flavor of the Jesus life, tang of risk and new adventure, taste and zest beyond belief.

Take whatever I can offer gifts that I have yet to find, skills that I am slow to sharpen, talents of the hand and mind, things made beautiful for others in the place where I must be: take my gifts and let me love you, God who first of all loved me.

*BENEDICTION

POSTLUDE

Important Event

Robert Schumann

Cynthia Roberts-Greene, guest pianist & Choir Director

ANNOUNCEMENTS ~ SUNDAY, September 3, 2023

We welcome **Cynthia Roberts-Greene** to the piano bench this morning while Greg is on vacation. Cynthia will be with us next Sunday too. We are grateful for her music ministry.

On Saturday ~ September 9 at 8 am ~ we could use YOUR help to Murphy Soap Oil the pews and continue to prepare for our Rededication Celebration on September 17. Many hands make light work. ***You are welcome to come at anytime and for as long as you can Saturday morning before 11 am.***

Do you have a special occasion coming up this summer? Do you enjoy the **flower arrangements** in the sanctuary each Sunday? If so, we have **the following Sundays available September 10th one opening, September 24th one opening and October 1st two openings, October 15th two openings October 29th one opening.** Please contact the church office to reserve a Sunday.

Family Promise Francis House Volunteer Opportunities ~ An expectant **mother with two children, ages 8 and 18 months** moved into Francis House the weekend of August 12. She is currently working so Family Promise congregations will help her by supplying a hot healthy meal once each weekend. First Congregational, UCC will supply meals in September with the help of our volunteers. Volunteers who are interested will also be attending one of two possible training events so that they can interact with the mother and children. Thank you for the support of time, money, food and supplies that so many of you have given to Family Promise. We ask for your prayers as the search for a center/shelter continues so that the shelter program for families can be started again. If so, please contact **Ellen Marsey or Dotty Reed** and they will be glad to add you to the year-round list and/or send you a current list of specific volunteer opportunities.

COLLAGE visit from Tom Edwards, September 10, Syster Hall Tom Edwards, LGBTQ+ Sarasota School Board member, will be speaking to COLLAGE on September 10, 12-1:00, in Syster Hall. He will share his thoughts on professional and personal experiences in the LGBTQ+ community. All church members are invited. Feel free to bring a friend. In lieu of a full luncheon, snacks will be available.

Sarasota United for Responsibility and Equity (SURE) ~ Monday, September 18th, at 6 p.m. at First Congregational United Church of Christ. We will hold our kickoff as well as a meet and greet with Mackenzie Grimes as the new lead organizer. First Congregational UCC will host our annual **House Meeting after both services on Sunday, October 15** in Syster Hall. Mackenzie is planning to participate with us this day.

Sacred Conversations on Race Continues on **September 13**: “The Urgency of Intersectionality” - TED Talks by Kimberle’ Crenshaw. **September 27**: “We Need to Talk about an Injustice” - TED Talks by Bryan Stevenson All are welcome! You can join either in person in the **Oasis Center** or on **Zoom**. Please see Jim Crumel for more information.

Our very own, Brenda Robinson has an art show, *Our Stories are in Our Scars* at the Unitarian Universalist Church ~ 3975 Fruitville Rd. There is an evening reception on **Friday, September 22 from 5-7**, the art show will be at the UU church from September 17-October 12

ALSO Youth, a local non-profit organization serving the LGBTQ+ youth community in Sarasota & Manatee Counties, is proud to present the art showcase, “Expressions Exhibition” on Thursday, September 7, 2023, at the Sarasota Opera House. The Exhibit will feature the works of local artists as well as youth artists from Sarasota and Manatee Counties. The Expressions Exhibition will include a silent auction of local artists’ works, live music, free lite bites, and a cash bar. Artwork in various mediums submitted by youth from Sarasota and Manatee County will also be showcased in celebration of their creative expressions. **Tickets available at www.givebutter.com/expressionsexhibit.**

LGBTQ+ Grief Support Group ~ A safe place to find strength and hope through the sharing and support of other grieving LGBTQ+ individuals. Not a therapy group, but an open discussion with others suffering the loss of someone close to them, whether a spouse, partner, friend, or family member. A twice monthly meeting to share, and to listen, and to find your voice. Meetings in the **Oasis Center** ~ **Contact Cas @ casbgroup1234@gmail.com**

Project 180 is hosting a speaker and luncheon on October 19 at Michael's On East. Doors open 11:00 and program 11:30 to 1:00. *A Look Behind the Scenes: The Realities of Prisoner Reentry.* Laura I. Appleman, JD, discusses the myriad ways in which criminal justice costs—fees, fines, court costs, probation payments, mandatory classes, and non-payment penalties—affect reentering citizens and how these costs can lead to years of indebtedness. Professor Appleman is a member of the faculty at the College of Law at Willamette University in Salem, Oregon where she is the Van Winkle Melton Professor of Law and a University Research Integrity Officer. **Go to Project 180 to purchase tickets, \$40 each and include lunch.**

SAVE THE DATE ~ Summer 2023 may well be remembered for Dangerous Floods and Deadly Wildfires, not to mention extreme heat. The scientists are telling us that the fires spread very quickly because the grasses are **invasive plants** rather than native. Have you ever driven north on I. 75 and seen the vast growth of kudzu, “the weed that ate the south,” on both sides of the highway? Every tree and bush and flower are covered by this invasive plant. What is the antidote to this and other plants gobbling up our world? The First UCC Women and the Green Team have assembled an **Environmental Panel: Why we must plant native flora in our gardens and be wary of invasive plants that destroy ecologies.** Join us on Tuesday, October 3, 2023, 11:30 am in Fellowship Hall. Panelists: Miri Hardy, Executive Director of the Friends of Myakka; Tom Heitzman, Sweet Bay Nursery; Lee Amos, Land Stewardship Manager, Conservation Foundation of the Gulf Coast. After the program, members of our Green Team will show us the native plants on our campus. Luncheon costs \$12. Sign up after either Sunday service or call the church office at 941-953-7044.

CALENDAR

Sunday, September 3

Sunday Worship, 11 am, in **Syster Hall** and online
Fellowship Time , noon, Syster Hall

Monday, September 4 ~ Labor Day

Church Campus Closed

Tuesday, September 5

Tuesday evening Bible Study, 6:30 pm, Zoom

Wednesday, September 6

Wednesday Morning Bible Study, 11 am, Oasis Center and Zoom
Worship Team Meeting, 1 pm, Zoom

Thursday, September 7

Green Team Meeting, 10 am, Oasis Center and Zoom

Saturday, September 8

Murphy Soap Oil Pews and Cleaning Sanctuary, 8 am

Sunday, September 10 ~ Welcome Cynthia Roberts-Greene

Sunday Worship, 8:45 am, Chapel
Sunday Worship, 11 am, in **Syster Hall** and online
COLLAGE Speaker, Tom Edwards

*We encourage you to subscribe to the weekly **Midweek Message** via your email
to keep connected with activities in the church.*