

***The First Congregational Church
of Essex Junction***
United Church of Christ



***A Welcoming Community, Accepting and Serving
All in the Spirit of Christ***

“The First Congregational Church of Essex Junction, United Church of Christ, is an Open and Affirming congregation, embracing diversity and affirming the dignity and worth of every person, because we are all created by a loving God. We seek to live Christ's call for compassion, justice, healing and wholeness in life. Therefore, we welcome into our community persons of every race, gender, age, sexual orientation, faith background, nationality, ethnicity, marital status, mental and physical ability, economic and social position, gender identity and expression, level of education and family structure. We invite all to share in the life, leadership, ordained ministry, lay ministry, worship, sacraments, responsibilities, fellowship, blessings, and joys of our congregation as we seek to grow together in faith and love.”

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Ash Wednesday Service 2019

Lent is a time when we re-examine our relationship to the Divine. We take the time to reflect on our great and all encumbrancing need to have God at the heart of our lives. Lent encourages us to slow down and see God in our daily lives as well as in the guiding light of the earth in her seasons. Come, let us enter into a journey where our “dust” may be experienced in the fullness of God’s presence both now and into eternity.

The Order of Worship

Prelude

Welcome, Introduction and Opening Words

Created Out of the Mud: Genesis 2:4b-7, 18-23

A Secular Reading and Reflection

There is no question that Earth has been a giving planet. Everything humans have needed to survive, and thrive, was provided by the natural world around us: food, water, medicine, materials for shelter, and even natural cycles such as climate and nutrients. Scientists have come to term such gifts ‘ecosystem services’, however the recognition of such services goes back thousands of years, and perhaps even farther if one accepts the caves paintings at Lascaux as evidence. Yet we have so disconnected ourselves from the natural world that it is easy—and often convenient—to forget that nature remains as giving as ever, even as it vanishes bit-by-bit. The rise of technology and industry may have distanced us superficially from nature, but it has not changed our reliance on the natural world: most of what we use and consume on a daily basis remains the product of multitudes of interactions within nature, and many of those interactions are imperiled. Beyond such physical goods, the natural world provides less tangible, but just as important, gifts in terms of beauty, art, and spirituality.

Besides the obvious gifts of the earth, it also gives us fresh water, pollination, seed dispersal, pest control, soil health, medicine, fisheries, biodiversity, wildlife abundance, climate regulation, economy, health, art, spirituality

Taken from an Earth Day Article 2019

Litany of Gratitude

Leader: From stardust gathering to form our planet,
to the primordial mud of our own bodily creation,
to the abundance of food the good earth yields upon the land,
to the healing power of nutrient rich mud,
to the infinite nature of life found in dirt.....God is present

People: **Thank you Divine Creator of the earth...
for the life you have breathed into us
for the beauty of the earth that inspires us
for the food which sustains us
for fellow travelers that journey with us
for the anguish and ecstatic joy of life that gives us meaning
for families and friends that love us
for work that gives us purpose
for an eternity that calls us to hope....**

Leader: Everything we are and everything we do is grounded upon God's good earth.
Come, let us sing of life and love and beauty.

Hymn

I Sing the Mighty Power of God

#12

¹ I sing the mighty power of God
that made the mountains rise,
That spread the flowing seas abroad,
and built the lofty skies.
I sing the wisdom that ordained
the sun to rule the day;
The moon shines full at God's command,
and all the stars obey.

² I sing the goodness of our God
that filled the earth with food;
God formed the creatures with a word,
and then pronounced them good.
Oh, how your wonders are displayed,
where'er I turn my eye:
If I survey the ground I tread,
or gaze upon the sky!

³ On earth there's not a plant or flower
but makes your glories known.
The clouds arise and spread their showers
by order from your throne.
All life is but a gift from you
and ever in your care;
Wherever people gather, you,
O God, are present there.

A Secular Reading and Response

“Leaves and Blossoms Along the Way”

By Mary Oliver

If you're John Muir you want trees to
Live among. If you're Emily, a garden
Will do.

Try to find the right place for yourself.
If you can't find it, at least dream of it.

When one is alone and lonely, the body
Gladly lingers in the wind or rain,
Or splashes into the cold river, or
Pushes through the ice crusted snow.

Anything that touches.

God, or the gods, are invisible, quite
Understandable. But holiness is visible,
Entirely.

Some words will never leave God's mouth,
No matter how hard you listen.

In all the works of Beethoven, you will
Not find a single lie.

All important ideas must include trees,
The mountains, and the rivers.

To understand many things you must reach out
Of your own condition.

For how many years did I wander slowly
Through the forest. What wonder and
Glory I would have missed had I ever been
In a hurry!

Beauty can both shout and whisper, and still
It explains nothing.

The point is, you're you, and that's for keeps.

The Sacrament of God's Abundant Table

Tonight, we will praise the abundance of God's table by coming forward to partake of the fruit of God's good earth. Come and celebrate the bounty granted to us. Absolutely everyone is welcome at Christ's table.

The Healing Power of Mud: John 9:1-12

A Secular Reading and Reflection

Mud is an important element of nature. It contains important minerals which have positive effects on human health. Mud can absorb toxins from human body therefore is very useful in preventing many diseases. It is also known for its healing properties. It also helps in cooling and relaxing body as it can hold moisture for a long time.

Benefits of Being Exposed to Dirt and Mud

1. It relaxes muscles and improves blood circulation. It maintains metabolism rendering positive impact on digestion.
2. It is useful in relieving the pain from inflammation / swelling.
3. It is a good hair conditioner and is good for treating skin disorders.
4. It helps blood circulation.
5. It helps the body's detoxification process.
6. It serves as an anti-inflammatory and relieves the pain of arthritis.
7. It improves cardiovascular health / diminishes strokes and heart attacks.
8. It's mycobacterium produces serotonin which improves emotional health by reducing stress, improving concentration, decreasing depression and mood swings and helps normalize sleep cycles.
9. Increases brain function and ability to concentrate.

An Invitation to Healing

During this time, people in need of healing are asked to come forward and either kneel at the kneeling bench or sit at the healing station and share with Rev. Mark / Deacon what type of healing for which you would like them to pray. While people come forward, we will sing.....

Hymn for Healing

Breathe on Me Breath of God

#292

¹ Breathe on me, Breath of God,
fill me with life anew
That I may love the way you love,
and do what you would do.

² Breathe on me, Breath of God,
until my heart is pure,
Until with you I will one will,
to do and to endure.

³ Breathe on me, Breath of God,
stir in me one desire:
That every earthly part of me
may glow with holy fire.

⁴ Breathe on me, Breath of God,
so shall I never die,
But live with you the perfect life
of your eternity.

God is in the Dirt: 2 Kings 5:1-19

The Application of God's Ashes (forehead or top of hand)

Leader: Come and allow the touch of your dust to enliven us anew to your presence.

"Remember that you are God's dust,
and to God you shall return."

People: God shaped and molded us out of the ingredients of the good earth. The rich soil feeds us, heals us and grounds us in the very presence of God. The law of gravity keeps us, like a magnet, ever connected to the source of all being. We long for the day, when like Christ, we rise from the dust to walk and play, talk and eat with our God and Creator in the garden of beauty and abundance beyond measure.

Leader: May the star dust on our forehead and hands remind us to whom we belong. May we always feel the presence of God as we stand on the good soil of God's creation and may our faith be renewed daily as we stand on Holy Ground. Amen and Alleluia.

Life Comes Out of the Earth: John 20:11-17

A Secular Reading and Reflection

Look again at that dot. That's here. That's home. That's us. On it everyone you love, everyone you know, everyone you ever heard of, every human being who ever was, lived out their lives. The aggregate of our joy and suffering, thousands of confident religions, ideologies, and economic doctrines, every hunter and forager, every hero and coward, every creator and destroyer of civilization, every king and peasant, every young couple in love, every mother and father, hopeful child, inventor and explorer, every teacher of morals, every corrupt politician, every "superstar," every "supreme leader, every saint and sinner in the history of our species lived there-on a mote of dust suspended in a sunbeam.

Carl Sagan

Sanctuary Choir Anthem

In the Bulb, There is a Flower

Pastoral Charge and Benediction

On the way out, everyone is invited to the narthex where there is a wheel barrel full of potting soil, cups and seeds. As Jesus claimed life out of death from a tomb of the earth, so too do we proclaim abundant life by taking a planting home and watching it come to life.

SERMON NOTES