



# FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH *of Essex Junction*

*Love. Serve. Grow.*

## ***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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# ***An Ecumenical Good Friday Service***

***April 3, 2026 ~ 12 noon***

*This year's Good Friday service will focus on Christ's seven last words from the cross and connect those words to the anguished pain of people who suffer and die in today's world. Though we share in the Christian tradition, Christ's death on the cross takes on different significance in the theologies of those leading worship today. As you listen to the reflections shared, you are invited to consider what the Cross and Jesus' death upon it means for you. Come and listen to Christ's most powerful sermon ever preached in his seven last words as we gather to hold the challenge and the call of the cross.*

Prelude

*Keep Watch*

Paul Zach

Welcome and Introduction ..... Rev. Mark Mendes

*No matter who you are or where you are on life's journey,  
you are welcome in this place.*

A Vision of God's Peaceable Kingdom: Isaiah 11:1-9..... Rev. Karen Mendes

*From the earliest days of the Hebrew people, God called individuals into the wilderness to create a different type of community, one grounded in a relationship to God. The natural outgrowth of that relationship is a people that live in peace, righteousness and love for all people. The Divine Presence continually draws people back to the Garden, Holy Mountain, Peaceable Kingdom, wilderness, exiled remnant, apocalyptic vision, or a New Heaven and New Earth.....always away from the ways of the world and into a place where God's love rules.*

*Isaiah's ancient vision connects Jesus and his message to the ancient calling.....*

Call to Worship..... Rev. Karen Mendes

Leader: Jesus preached love and justice for all God's children in Galilee.

**People: He healed wounds, offered hope, nourished with food, and filled people with the very presence of God.**

Leader: He healed wounds, offered hope, nourished with food, and filled people with the very presence of God.

**People: Jesus loved people with abandon and they loved him back.**

Leader: Jesus turned from Galilee to Jerusalem and the temple authorities, inviting them to join him in sharing God with the people. They declined and instead responded to the perceived threat to their power with plans to kill Jesus.

**People: Here we gather in the shadow of the cross.**

Leader: Come, let us worship the God of love and justice.

Come, let us wrestle with the challenge of the cross.

Come, let us ground our lives in Christ's words from the Cross!

Prayer of Invocation and **Unison Lord's Prayer** .....Rev. Karen Mendes  
***Loving God***, 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 trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. ***And do not let us fall into temptation***, but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever, amen.

\*Hymn

***When I Survey The Wondrous Cross***

When I survey the wondrous cross,  
on which the Christ of glory died,  
My richest gain I count but loss,  
and pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, then, that I should boast,  
save in the death of Christ, my God;  
All the vain things that charm me most  
I sacrifice them to Christ's blood.

From sacred head, from hands, and feet,  
sorrow and love flow mingled down!  
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,  
or thorns compose so rich a crown?

Were the whole realm of nature mine,  
that were a present far too small;  
Love so amazing, so divine,  
demands my soul, my life, my all.

## The Seven Last Words of Jesus.....

I. The First by Rev. Jessica Moore: First Congregational, UCC in St. Albans

**Father, forgive them for they do not know what they do. Luke 23:34**

*“That’s fine, dude, I’m not mad at you.”*

*Renee Good, aged 37  
Killed by an ICE Officer*

Prayer: Thank you, God, for the gift of forgiveness.

**Musical Congregational Response: Were You There**

**Were you there when they crucified my Lord?**

**Were you there when they crucified my Lord?**

**Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.**

**Were you there when they crucified my Lord?**

II. The Second by Rev. Jared Hamilton: United Church of Hinesburg UCC

**Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise. Luke 23:43**

*“Everything is good, I’m good.”*

*US Army Reserve Sgt. Declan Coady, aged 20  
From Des Moines Iowa Army Reserve  
Killed in Iranian Drone Strike, Kuwait*

Prayer: Thank you, God, for Hope is in the midst of darkness.

**Musical Congregational Response: Were You There**

**Were you there when they crucified my Lord?**

**Were you there when they crucified my Lord?**

**Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.**

**Were you there when they crucified my Lord?**

III. The Third by Rev. Dr. James D. Ross: 1st Congregational Church Burlington, UCC

**Woman, here is your son; Here is your mother. John 19:26-7**

*“Are you okay?”*

*Alex Pretti, aged 37  
An intensive care nurse  
Killed by ICE agents in Minneapolis*

Prayer: Thank you, God, for calling us to care for others.

**Musical Congregational Response: Were You There**

**Were you there when they crucified my Lord?**

**Were you there when they crucified my Lord?**

**Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.**

**Were you there when they crucified my Lord?**

IV. The Fourth by Rev. Jessica Derise: College Street Congregational Church, UCC

**My God, My God, why have you forsaken me. Matthew 27:46**

*“How did switching lanes with no signal turn into all of this?”*

*Sandra Bland, aged 28*

Prayer: Thank you, God, for being with us in the struggle.

**Musical Congregational Response: Were You There**

**Were you there when they crucified my Lord?**

**Were you there when they crucified my Lord?**

**Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.**

**Were you there when they crucified my Lord?**

V. The Fifth by Rev. Hadley Bunting: Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

**I am thirsty. John 19:28**

*“I can’t breathe, I can’t breathe,*

*Byron Williams, aged 50*

*I can’t breathe, I can’t breathe,*

*I can’t breathe.”*

Prayer: Thank you, God, for calling us to care for ourselves.

**Musical Congregational Response: Were You There**

**Were you there when they crucified my Lord?**

**Were you there when they crucified my Lord?**

**Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.**

**Were you there when they crucified my Lord?**

VI. The Sixth by Rev. Dr. Mike Galica: Congregational Church of South Hero, UCC

**It is finished. John 19:30**

*“I’m so sorry its your birthday  
and it shouldn’t be like this.”*

*Tierra Walker, aged 37  
San Antonio, TX*

*Words said to her son  
shortly before dying from complications due to pregnancy.  
She had been denied an abortion because of the state’s ban,  
which does not make exceptions for medical necessity.*

Prayer: Thank you, God, for being with us in the struggle.

**Musical Congregational Response: Were You There**

**Were you there when they crucified my Lord?**

**Were you there when they crucified my Lord?**

**Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.**

**Were you there when they crucified my Lord?**

VII. The Seventh by Rev. Ava Bilton: First Congregational Burlington, UCC

**Father into your hands, I commend my spirit. Luke 23: 46**

*“We’re not trying to get into women’s spaces to be perverts.*

*We just want to be ourselves.*

*We don’t mean any harm to anyone.”*

*Lia Nicole Smith, aged 21  
A Middlebury student athlete who died of suicide.  
Lia, who was transgender, made these comments  
after President Trump’s executive order calling for  
a ban on transgender athletes in women’s sports.*

Prayer: Thank you, God, for giving us power over life and death.

Closing Song

*See the Love*

by The Brilliance

Concluding Comments & Benediction.....Rev. Mark Mendes

Postlude

*\*Everyone is encouraged to celebrate the ties that bind us together as the clergy and churches of  
this area with a lunch downstairs.*

## Participants

Rev. Ava Bilton ..... First Congregational Church of Burlington, UCC  
Rev. Hadley Bunting .....Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC  
Rev. Jessica Derise ..... College Street Congregational Church, UCC: Burlington  
Rev. Mike Galica .....Congregational Church of South Hero, UCC  
Mowgli Giannitt: guitar and piano..... First Congregational Church in Burlington  
Rev. Jared Hamilton..... United Church of Hinesburg, UCC  
Rev. Karen Mendes ..... First Baptist Church of Burlington  
Rev. Mark Mendes..... First Congregational Church of Essex Junction, UCC  
Rev. Jessica Moore ..... First Congregational Church of St. Albans, UCC  
Grace Palmer: vocals ..... First Congregational Church in Burlington  
Rev. Dr. James D. Ross II..... First Congregational Church of Burlington, UCC

