

First Baptist Church in Needham

858 Great Plain Avenue, Needham
MA 02492 www.fbcneedham.org

Meditations for Sunday, June 21,
2020

*(or whenever you are so led to
pause, reflect, and pray)*

3rd Sunday after Pentecost

Edition 14



Lighting the Candle of Life

You may wish to light a candle or use the candle photo as a focus.

ALL: We light the Candle of Life — a
candle that represents community, spirit, and the fullness of all of life — birth and death
and all the transitions in between and beyond.



Preparing to Enter Worship

“Because I saw my father every day, his presence was deeply imprinted on my consciousness....My father and I wear the same size shoes; beyond that our resemblances are few. I’m a little taller, substantially heavier with longer limbs, and my facial features bear the unmistakable influence of my mother’s side of the family. But as a child, I always insisted to amused adult relatives that I looked like my father. When I was in first grade, I dragged my mother all over town in pursuit of wing-tipped shoes, thinking that if I really wanted to be seen as my father’s miniature carbon copy, I could start with the feet and work my way up.”¹

Invitation: *Hold this memory throughout the service, and imagine it is Ishmael speaking of Abraham.*

¹ Jabari Asim, *We Can’t Breathe: On Black Lives, White Lies, and the Art of Survival*, (New York: Picador, 2018), 74-75.

Hymn 438

On Eagle's Wings

words & music by Michael Joncas

Father Jan Michael Joncas (b. 1951) is a Catholic priest and renowned composer of contemporary Catholic hymns and songs. He has served numerous parishes and university Newman Centers in Minnesota, and has composed a wide variety of church music that draws upon scriptural images, consolation, peace and justice, and God's prevailing presence. Currently, Joncas is the Artist in Residence and Research Fellow in Catholic Studies at University of St. Thomas in St. Paul Minnesota.² Read aloud or sing with the Ambassadors Chorale Arts Society of the Adventist University of the Philippines online: https://youtu.be/hd-mV_p8CZY.³

You who dwell in the shelter of the Lord,
who abide in his shadow for life, say to the
Lord, "My refuge, my Rock in whom I trust."

[Refrain]

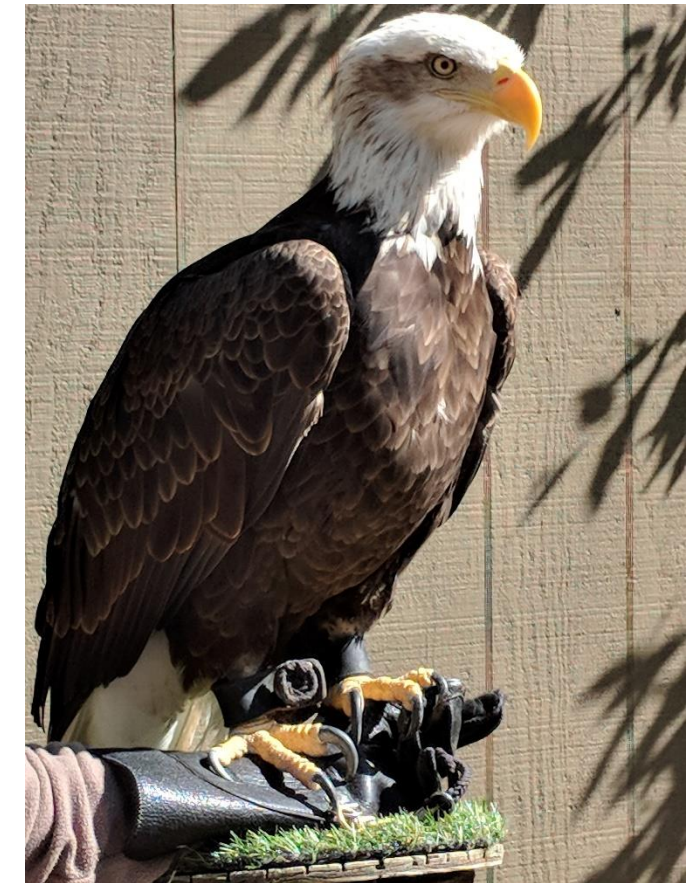
*And God will raise you up on eagle's wings,
bear you on the breath of dawn,
make you to shine like the sun,
and hold you in the palm of his hand.*

A Reading from Genesis 21:8-21 (NRSV)

Read the text aloud. Pause and notice what image or phrase stands out or "shimmers" as you tell the story.

The child grew, and was weaned; and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned. But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, playing with her son Isaac. So she said to Abraham, "Cast out this slave woman with her son; for the son of this slave woman shall not inherit along with my son Isaac."

The matter was very distressing to Abraham on account of his son. But God said to Abraham, "Do not be distressed because of the boy and because of your slave woman; whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for it is through Isaac that offspring shall be named for you. As for the son of the slave woman, I will make a nation of him also, because he is your offspring."



The snare of the fowler will never capture you,
And famine will bring you no fear,
Under God's wings your refuge,
His faithfulness your shield. [Refrain]

You need not fear the terror of the night,
Nor the arrow that flies by day;
Though thousands fall about you,
Near you it shall not come. [Refrain]

² <https://www.ocp.org/en-us/artists/413/michael-joncas> . During COVID19, Father Joncas has written and published a new song specifically about the pandemic that draws from Psalm 23's image of "The Lord is my shelter." Listen to "Shelter Me" here: <https://youtu.be/F3KifN7Jfpc>

³ 2012 HopeChannel TV performance.



So Abraham rose early in the morning, and took bread and a skin of water, and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, along with the child, and sent her away. And she departed, and wandered about in the wilderness of Beer-sheba. When the water in the skin was gone, she cast the child under one of the bushes. Then she went and sat down opposite him a good way off, about the distance of a bowshot; for she said, "Do not let me look on the death of the child." And as she sat opposite him, she lifted up her voice and wept.

And God heard the voice of the boy; and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven, and said to her, "What troubles you, Hagar? Do not be afraid; for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is. Come, lift up the boy and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make a great nation of him." Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. She went, and filled the skin with water, and gave the boy a drink. God was with the boy, and he grew up; he lived in the wilderness, and became an expert with

the bow. He lived in the wilderness of Paran; and his mother got a wife for him from the land of Egypt.

ALL: The word of our Lord. Thanks be to God.

Hymn 461

Breathe on Me, Breath of God

TRENTHAM

This prayerful hymn is our initial Pentecost response to reading aloud and hearing the word of God in worship. In the time of COVID19 and in light of the cries of George Floyd and African-Americans over the centuries of, "I can't breathe!" we hold to the Truth of the Spirit's Breath imbued in each person as a child of promise and of God. With voices around the globe, we claim the Spirit's embodied breath as that which sustains and enables us to hear the sacred Word and live into it until all souls are returned to health, safe, respected, and drawn into community. Sing or read it aloud as your prayerful response to the above text, or allow the quartet of voices from St. Mark's United Methodist Church, Houston, TX, wash over you online at

https://youtu.be/3qV_IHByYBk.⁴

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.

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

Breathe on me, Breath of God,
so shall I never die,
but live with you the perfect life
for all eternity.

⁴ <https://www.smumc.org/>

A Place in the Family ...

Today's scripture returns us to last week's story of Abraham and Sarah entertaining the Lord, *Dei*, and learning Sarah would bring a child into the world. However, this week's text reveals the backstory in the family – the child – Abraham's son, as well – who was already there. Ishmael, the son born as a surrogate child for Sarah by the rape of her slave Hagar (see Genesis 16-17), was already around 14 years old when Isaac is born. Ishmael is Abraham's first born son, and recognized as such. God had also promised Hagar in her distress after Ishmael was born that her child would also have numerous descendants. Systems of enslavement, women's inherent worthiness, status and power, patriarchy, loss, abuse and assault, favoring one child over another, disinheritance, and abandonment are interwoven through this family's story – a family that God still loves.

- *What is my place in my family of origin? My birth-order?*
- *What roles do I play in my family? What is expected of me? What do I get away with?*
- *How would different members of my family describe me?*
- *As I consider my own family of origin, what is the story I tell of my growing up, and what do I leave out?*

Hymn

Nearer, My God, to Thee

BETHANY

Sarah Flower Adams (1805-1848) was an English Unitarian who wrote both spiritual formation and hymns for her church. At her pastor's request, 13 of her hymns were published in his collection in 1841 for use in the church's chapel. All of Adams' songs remain mainstays particularly in the U.S. However, this one, with its longing focus to draw ever nearer to God, has drawn wide favor. Read or sing the words or listen to a 2020 acapella arrangement by Vocal Majority Chorus online at: <https://youtu.be/lvJG3k2Lxxc> and note that the Latin the chorus sings translates to: "At the moment of death, my strength is from heaven. With God helping, nothing should be feared forever. Direct us, O Lord, to high places by narrow roads. Such is the path to the stars, ever upward. Ever upward!"⁵

Nearer, my God, to thee, nearer to thee!
E'en though it be a cross that raiseth me,
still all my song shall be,
nearer, my God, to thee;
nearer, my God, to thee, nearer to thee!

There let the way appear, steps unto heaven;
all that thou sendest me, in mercy given;
angels to beckon me
nearer, my God, to thee;
nearer, my God, to thee, nearer to thee!

Though like the wanderer, the sun gone down,
darkness be over me, my rest a stone;
yet in my dreams I'd be
nearer, my God, to thee;
nearer, my God, to thee, nearer to thee!

(turn page)

⁵ Vocal Majority's video features a combined choir of nine quartet Gold Medalists from the Barbershop Harmony Society's Association of International Champions. This arrangement is by James Stevens. Note: this recording was made prior to the COVID19 shelter-at-home orders. Learn more about Vocal Majority at www.vocalmajority.com.

Then, with my waking thoughts bright with
thy praise,
out of my stony griefs Bethel I'll raise;
so by my woes to be
nearer, my God, to thee;
nearer, my God, to thee, nearer to thee!

Or if, on joyful wing cleaving the sky,
sun, moon, and stars forgot, upward I fly,
still all my song shall be,
nearer, my God, to thee;
nearer, my God, to thee, nearer to thee!

Prayers of the People

Enter into this time in song. If you don't know the tune, let the words be the doorway to your prayer.

Sung Prayer

Hear My Prayer, O Lord

BENZENHAFER
arr. Holly C. Benzenhafer

Hear my prayer, O Lord. Hear my prayer, O Lord.
I am asking, hear my prayer, O Lord.

Prayerful Meditation

"What's a mystic?" I asked. I knew the word "mystery" and was intrigued.
"A person who talks to God," Maw said.
--Kirin Narayan⁶

Enter into our shared prayer knowing you are a person who talks with God.

We Hold in Prayer...

*Many of this week's prayers are requests from members of our congregation in the past week. **If you have general or specific prayer requests—joys as well as concerns—to share please contact Holly or Daryn to pass them along.***

As a community of faith gathered in Spirit when we cannot be in person, we offer our hearts and voices in prayer where we are, as we are, entrusting the Spirit's moving among us and responding far beyond our individual reach and influence...

As our country witnesses close to 2.2 million cases of COVID19 and nears 120,000 deaths, we hold persons ill and those grieving to your tender mercies. With Ann, we give thanks that **Bruce** has recovered and returned to a first-floor room at Wingate where family may visit through his window. We honor the considerable care of staff at assisted living and retirement communities who dedicate themselves to protecting the residents from this illness. For their continued health and well-being and that of families who live in the strain of not being able to be close to their loved ones...and for those souls we now name...*Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer....*

⁶Kirin Narayan, *My Family & Other Saints* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 18.

With Pastor Holly, we lift to God's eternal embrace dear folk who have died from non-COVID19 illness and injury since we last entered into common prayer. We hold Holly's aunt, **Debra Rose Benzenhafer**, who died from complications from surgery on June 12. We pray for Deb's husband **Tom**, her family, church, and community who now grieve her absence and live in the light of the legacy of her life among them that they know God's deep consolation. For this dear soul and all persons who have entered God's nearer presence since last we entered prayer together, souls who grieve this day... and for souls whose names we speak aloud...*Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer....*

With Bev, Clif, Harry, Liz, Ernie, Andrew, we hold persons living with non-COVID19 illness and injury requiring hospitalization or treatment. We surround **Ernie** with prayers of concern and love knowing you journey alongside him every step of the journey through cancer treatments of radiation and chemotherapy. We give thanks for **John's** recent procedure going well and leaving him with energy rather than being drained. With Andrew, we hold baby **Carmen** to your tender care as she awaits testing for her heart murmur and her mother, **Wren**, as she navigates the complexities of medical systems, a newborn, and interstate traffic. We also lift **Helen Turner** to your comfort and care as she is treated in hospital for broken ribs from a fall and awaits a biopsy on spots discovered on her lungs. In the midst of suffering and unknowing, life changes and beloved presence, we gather these souls before you, Holy Spirit, and now speak the names of persons likewise confronting serious medical conditions...*Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer....*

With Ernie, Harry, Ann, Louise, and Pastor Holly, we rejoice in the constancy of family and friends who care for us and hold us in their hearts and prayer...*Praise God, from whom all blessings flow....*

With Jim and Clif we hold in prayer our own desires to be gathered in person in worship. We long for the tactile feel of community, and yet live in the tension that our safest course is to not express our love and compassion with one another in the ways we learned from our birth to do so. In our longing to reach out with hugs and handshakes, help us envision how we may be present with one another in new and creative ways. In our desire to worship in the same space, remind us of your omnipresence and that for this season we hold vigil with souls who cannot enter these beloved spaces for far more reasons than the pandemic. In our lament at what is lost, turn us to hope for the church anew as She continues to be formed and reformed generation after generation, never the same and yet constantly the Body of Christ...*Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer....*

With Ernie, Louise and Ann, we give thanks for FBC Needham people and all the ways in which we care for and bless one another. And with Ernie, we give thanks for the Worship Resource that draws us into community and loving kindness through scripture, shared prayer, reflection, art, and song each week. We especially appreciate the words of hymns both old and new that touch our hearts, renew our spirits, and enable us to move into the week carrying our worship within us...*Praise God, from whom all blessings flow....*

With Marty, we ask for prayers of deep listening to one another, to hear and respect each other, and to care with great compassion for persons overlooked, harmed, and pushed aside. Then, lead us to faithfulness to continue to live with intention to make the world better each day...*Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer....*

With Andrew, we hold our sister congregation, the **Presbyterian Church in Needham**, as they ended their ministry as a congregation on Sunday, June 14. As they grieve this ending and turn toward new avenues of work, worship, and service, may the Spirit scatter them as seeds upon good soil that takes root and grows far beyond what they can now imagine...*Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer....*



With Clif and Louise, we give thanks for the pleasure of being with friends...*Praise God, from whom all blessings flow....*

With John and Liz, we celebrate the joy of relative's birthdays, and the goodness of their lives among us as they enter a new year untested and new to live...*Praise God, from whom all blessings flow....*

With Andrew, Ann, and Liz, we are grateful for the beautiful spring days and the capacity to clean and ready yards for summer. And we look forward to when the pollen count goes down...*Praise God, from whom all blessings flow....*

With John, we anticipate the wonder of new life as he awaits the birth of three grandchildren (one in July and twins in September). As we pray for his daughter-in-laws, Eliza and Elizabeth, that their health and wellbeing continue, we join them in the hope and promise of these three little ones soon among us...*Praise God, from whom all blessings flow....*

With Liz, we offer thanksgiving for an ordinary, routine week that allows time to get things done...*Praise God, from whom all blessings flow....*

For the prayers of our hearts that you, Holy One, know even when words cannot hold them...*Hear my prayer, O Lord....*

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come,
your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our sins

as we forgive those who sin against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For yours is the kingdom, and the power,
and the glory forever. Amen.

When Families Break...

Abraham and Sarah's treatment of the slave Hagar and Abraham's and her son, Ishmael, was considered acceptable treatment of people in their time. We read it in 2020 with eyes growing ever-sensitive to the terrible injustices and assumptions about human value and life depicted here. However, we do so only with the additional responsibility of continually examining our own assumptions about what is acceptable and right in how we treat both those we claim as family and the larger circles of the human family around the globe. We are responsible to hear the lived stories of people even when they are unfamiliar, uncomfortable, and put us on defense, *and* we are responsible to reflect on why we are unfamiliar, uncomfortable, and defensive. Then, we might begin to "break the family" in ways that free us—rather than bind us—from the systems of injustice that prevent us thriving as a people of full blessing.

- *Whose story do I not want to hear among all the stories in humanity's family? How may I be receptive to this people's (or a single person's) story this week?*



- *In our society over the last few weeks, we have been granted the opportunity—an invitation—to experience our own living stories through others' eyes. How has learning that my experience is incongruent with the experiences of people of color who shared the same community, life-events, and generation as me impacted me over the last few weeks? What am I in need of learning? How may God's assurance to never abandon or forsake any of us offer me a steady hand of guidance as I reflect on the changing narrative of my past and the opportunity to change the story I have today and going forward?*

Hymn 591

When Cross the Crowded Ways of Life

GERMANY

Frank Mason North (1850-1935) was a Methodist Episcopal pastor in New York. He served as secretary of several denominational and missions societies. Growing up after the Civil War and living through the U.S. industrial revolution, North was attuned to the inflow of people to cities and the particular plight of urban living. With this text, he penned the first social gospel hymn that addresses the particular needs of city dwellers using New York City as his inspiration. An advocate for women's rights, child labor laws, and workers' unions, North's text resonates as strongly today as it did a century ago.⁷ Read aloud or sing the text or sing to instrumental accompaniment online at: <https://youtu.be/cndZgBlOstw>.⁸

Where cross the crowded ways of life,
where sound the cries of race and clan,
above the noise of selfish strife,
we hear your voice, O Son of Man.

In haunts of wretchedness and need,
on shadowed thresholds fraught with fears,
from paths where hide the lures of greed,
we catch the vision of your tears.

From tender childhood's helplessness,
from human grief and burdened toil,
from famished souls, from sorrow's stress,
your heart has never known recoil.

The cup of water given for you
still holds the freshness of your grace;
yet long these multitudes to view
the sweet compassion of your face.

O Master, from the mountainside,
make haste to heal these hearts of pain;
among these restless throngs abide;
O tread the city's streets again;

Till all the world shall learn your love,
and follow where your feet have trod;
till glorious from your heaven above
shall come the city of our God.

Offering

For online giving, go to <https://www.fbcneedham.org> or continue to support the ongoing ministry of the church by sending a check to the church office via mail to: First Baptist Church in Needham, 858 Great Plain Avenue, Needham MA 02492. Please indicate it is your offering or pledge on the check.

Doxology

OLD HUNDREDTH

Praise God from whom all blessings flow. Praise God, all creatures here below.

Praise God above ye heavenly host. Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

Benediction

(Speak these words of benediction knowing that you are part of a loving community of faith. If you lit a candle at the beginning, you may wish to blow it out now.)

One: Our blessing to one another is that we are here for one another, that we are with one another, that we celebrate and remember one another along the journey.

ALL: We extinguish the Candle of Life, but the Light continues to shine within us. As we pass the peace we carry the Light of the Candle of Life from this hour into this world and beyond, offering peace, hope and light wherever the journey leads.

⁷ C. Michael Hawn. <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/history-of-hymns-where-cross-the-crowded-ways-of-life>

⁸ Provided by HymnSite (2013)

Passing of the Peace

(Picture in your mind's eye the faces of beloved souls with whom you would share the peace of Christ in person if you could, and offer each one your blessing of peace.)

One: The peace of Christ be with you.

ALL: And also with you.

One: Let us greet one another in peace as we prepare for the journey ahead.

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Announcements

While the Church Office and Building are currently closed, our ministry continues!

Pastoral and office staff are working from home. Office voicemail and email are being checked regularly. If you have a pastoral concern, contact Pastor Daryn or Pastor Holly by email, phone, or text.

Needham Interfaith Clergy Conversations – Our community's ministers continue to offer thoughtful online conversations on different topics. The latest video concerns how we may respond within our traditions to the demonstrations in our country and around the world over racism, white supremacy, systemic injustice, and the overwhelming trauma, pain, and grief felt and expressed. You may watch the video at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jBx1Hgvkcsk> . For earlier videos, search YouTube for "Needham Interfaith Clergy Conversations."

Missions Giving – Local - FBC Needham is a community that cares authentically about justice, mercy, and actively helping people through mission and worship. In the midst of the coronavirus crisis when the need is greater than ever before, please give freely to our congregational Missions budget by check or online.

And Global – June is **One Great Hour of Sharing** offering month. OGHS is the American Baptist response to worldwide disaster relief and development. It is a channel for national and international aid in times of crisis that allows our offerings to join those of other ABC congregations and extend our ministry and service collectively. Your offering to OGHS and our FBC Needham Missions budget may be received either by check or designated online on our church Paypal link at www.fbcneedham.org.

Do You Need Washable Masks? Be Kind Needham Masks for Seniors is a local organization making washable fabric masks available to local senior residents *for free*. Your health and safety in the weeks and months ahead is paramount, and having reusable, washable masks aids sanitation, is environmentally friendly, and is cost-effective. If you or a senior you know need masks, please contact Pastor Daryn or Pastor Holly.

Needham Community Council continues to provide necessary resources and food to individuals in need of their services. If you or someone you know are in need of reaching out to them

or if you want to learn how you can best volunteer to help at this time, go to their website at: <http://needhamcommunitycouncil.org>. *Please note: They ARE NOT accepting drop-off donations at this time due to safety protocols. Financial donations are greatly appreciated and needed.*

MASSACHUSETTS COUNCIL of CHURCHES **ONECHURCHFUND**

The Massachusetts Council of Churches and its member congregations and denominations believe in One Church. We believe all parts of the body of Christ are necessary. And, at this terrible moment when so many people are suffering because of the COVID19, some parts of the body of Christ are suffering more than others. As members of the one body of Christ, we cannot say to one another, "I have no need of you."

Through the One Church Fund, the Massachusetts Council of Churches prioritizes the financial, practical, and relational support of immigrant, Black, poor, unhoused, and unaffiliated churches.

Many of these churches' needs are going unmet by federal, state, denominational, and local church resources, even as they have been decimated by the circumstances of the COVID19 pandemic compounded by long legacies of racial and economic disparities and systemic inequities. Churches are essential service providers, especially in immigrant Black, poor, and homeless communities. Immigrant churches and Black churches have long operated with an outsized role in meeting the needs of their communities, by providing education, banking, health care, food, clothing, mental health and spiritual support, often because other institutions failed to provide care.

The need for your support is urgent and growing because many of these vibrant churches operate from plate to plate, with no reserves, no endowment, no savings. These churches are in danger of closing critical ministries because of the economic crisis caused by COVID19. These churches are experiencing increasing need at a time of decreasing local resources. We need your help to unify and sustain these churches in the communities experiencing the most suffering. We can be a balm to one another in the Body of Christ. To learn more, go to <https://www.onechurchfund.org/about/>

Please give generously and ask for what you need to ensure the whole body of Christ endures.

You can also donate through our church's Paypal link at www.fbcneedham.org.

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Photo of the stained glass windows at the Presbyterian Church in Needham on page 7 is found at www.needhampresbyterian.org.