



Christmas 2018

A Message from Pastor Joel

Christmas greetings to you! I'm happy to be able to celebrate this time with our church community. The Sunday after Easter when I told the church I would need to step away from the pulpit to receive medical treatment, I gave a sermon on Acts 4:32-35, called "Potluck Church" that concluded with these words:

What we see in the early Christian community is not only a sharing of themselves: a potluck of talents and insights and songs and encouraging words and deeds; but also a sharing of their goods: an opening of their hearts and of their hands, defying the well-ingrained tendency of humans to horde and hold on for the sake of self-preservation. A great grace was upon them all, and they shared what they had, and no one wanted for anything. This is a troubling vision for a world so bent on private accumulation. But, if we are safe in God's love, if we are ultimately children of God, able to trust in God's provision, then we *can* open our hands, even as God has opened God's own hands to all living things. And we can gather in potluck fashion, sharing ourselves, sharing our goods. And I believe that, as we live into that vision, we give testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and a great grace is upon us all. Amen.

In the months that followed, I witnessed the grace of this vision being made manifest in the work of the church community to continue on caring for one another and serving the Acworth community, even as I experienced this grace firsthand in cards and prayers and meals and all kinds of support that were shown to me and to my family over the summer. Truly the United Church of Acworth is a place where God's grace has grown a kind of garden for the nourishment of the community. The African proverb says that it takes a village to raise a child and I believe that. I've also come to believe it takes a village to sustain an adult through the many "dangers, toils, and snares" that life will bring us into. Grace means something like: the Spirit will make a way when there seems to be no way. "Twas grace that brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home." We need one another, we need spiritual community, we need gatherings and good work the like of which the United Church of Acworth is about, to nourish our spirits, to connect in community, to manifest a little pocket of the beloved community on earth as in heaven.

And so, I invite you this Christmas season, as you celebrate God's coming among us as a baby, take a moment to consider the grace of God's continuing to come among us in communities of care like Acworth. As we close out a year of both great challenge and great grace, I invite you to join in our chorus of thanksgiving for the God who is always with us, guiding us and making a way where there is no way. And I ask you to please keep our church community in your thoughts and prayers as we continue to seek to follow Jesus in the way of radical love. This community of care is truly a potluck and as we share of ourselves and our goods we find that God generously supplies all we need. Thank you for sharing with us in this good work. May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all (2 Cor 13:14).

Grace and peace to you,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joel Eaton".

Rev. Joel Eaton

A Message from the Stewardship Committee

We are a small, but vibrant Christian community, and are thankful for God's faithfulness through the good times as well as the unexpected challenges. This year, we were faced with the gravity of our Pastor Joel's sudden illness. Thankfully we can rejoice that his cancer has just been officially declared "in remission."

Now we also look ahead to the life and health of our church community. Although we have been presented with several challenges, the foremost need is financial. From May to October there was a substantial drop in attendance accompanied by a reduction in the total weekly giving.

We have received many suggestions for changes to how we use the church and the community aid buildings. We will further develop these suggestions into more detailed proposals for the church community to consider. Another obvious direction is to develop programming to interest more community members in associating with our spiritual community. To maintain our buildings, our outreach, and our ministry in the community, immediate challenges are following us into the new year and we welcome all gifts to work toward reducing the deficit.

Thank you for your time, monetary gifts, and support. It is with heartfelt gladness and joy that we wish you a blessed Christmas and a Prosperous and Healthy 2019.

The Stewardship Committee.
(Dennis Eaton, Jim Neidert, Ken and Mary Lou Reed)

United Church of Acworth, PO Box 2010, Acworth, NH 03601

Name _____

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