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*O God, make the door of this house
wide enough to receive all who need human love and fellowship,
but narrow enough to shut out envy, pride, and strife.*

*Make its threshold
smooth enough to be no stumbling block to children,
nor to straying feet,
but rugged and strong enough to turn back the Tempter's power.*

*God, make the door of this house
the gateway to Thine eternal kingdom.*

November 29, 2020 – The First Sunday of Advent

Blessings, Everyone!

Keeping in Touch With Our Church Family

Concerns:

We hold in prayer:

- Our country. We stand in need of prayer for healing and a new, more inclusive, more enlightened vision of who we are, and the patience and dedication to make this a reality for all people.
- Joe Biden and Kamala Harris, our President-Elect and Vice President-Elect, and their new administration
- Those who have become estranged from members of their family and/or close friends because of differing views regarding politics and the recent election.

Thank you to:

- Jim Holmes – for faithfully ringing the church bell at 11:00 a.m. every Sunday morning to remind our neighbors and the world that we are still here, and for sending us pictures of the church and church grounds so we remember what they look like
- all those who have been faithful in their yearly pledges to the General Fund
- the new members of our church family who are supporting us financially in ways that are helping us survive this difficult time

Sunday Worship as the Gathered Church

The Diaconate are continuing to discuss when we might be able to resume worship and other church meetings in person on some level. At the present time, with the coronavirus numbers dramatically up in Massachusetts, and with gatherings of any kind, including religious gatherings, identified as a major source of the contagion, we will not be able to gather together

in worship during the Christmas season. Most churches are hoping that early availability of a safe and effective vaccine will make our Easter celebration at least a possibility.

Missions:

Our mission outreach for the month of November is the Salvation Army. Our church has been supporting this mission for decades, and Bud and Martha Hubley spent many years running the Salvation Army soup kitchen in downtown Framingham. Every December, all members of our church family who donate to the Salvation Army through our church's special offering will have their names appear on a Christmas card that we send to everyone. This card takes the place of sending out individual Christmas cards to people in our church family, and the money that would have gone to the purchase of cards and postage provide goods and services for people in need.

In 1891, Salvation Army Captain Joseph McFee came up with the idea to provide a free Christmas dinner to over 1,000 homeless and hungry people in San Francisco.

He has only one problem: how to pay for it. After a great deal of prayer, he remembered the "Simpson's Pot," a large iron kettle back home in Liverpool, England, into which passersby would throw spare change to help the poor.

The next day, he set up a similar pot at the foot of Market Street in San Francisco. Beside it he placed a sign that read, "Keep the Pot Boiling." Soon San Franciscans began dropping spare change into Captain McFee's donation pot. By the end of the first day, he had collected enough money to fund his Christmas feast.

This is how the Red Kettle was born. Today the Salvation Army's Red Kettles and bell ringers are a comforting tradition at Christmastime. The famous Christmas carol "Silver Bells" was inspired by the sound of volunteers ringing Salvation Army bells during the Christmas season.

Today, donations to the Salvation Army offer the opportunity to share God's love with millions of people by providing practical help to those who might otherwise be forgotten—lonely seniors, people who are ill, families trapped in poverty, and countless others.

Since we will probably not be shopping at malls this Christmas season (we aren't, are we?!), we can all support this worthy cause through our church's December mission offering.

Jesus said, "I was hungry, and you gave me something to eat." (Matthew 25:35)

Audio Weekly Worship Service

We are offering a weekly worship service that has a link on the home page of our church website: www.firstcommunitychurch.com; there is also a link at the top of the sermons page. Each service is listed by date. The reflection/homily is the reflection that is sent to those on our expanded church contact list, a list that is comprised of church members, members of our larger church family, and friends of the church who have asked to be put on our contact list. The pastor's reflection is also accessible in printed form on our website in the sermon section.

Quote/Thought of the Day

His Holiness, the XIVth Dalai Lama, wrote:

*Every day,
think as you wake up
Today I am fortunate
to have woken up.*

*I am alive,
I have a precious human life.*

I am not going to waste it.

*I am going to use
all my energies to develop myself,
to expand my heart out to others,
to achieve enlightenment for the benefit of all beings.*

*I am going to have
kind thoughts towards others.*

*I am not going to get angry,
or think badly about others.*

*I am going to benefit others
as much as I can.*

A Second Quote/Thought of the Day

We all need to experience/access/practice patience if we are to reverse the upward trend of this coronavirus pandemic and return life and our economy to not only normal but also healthy.

“Patience is the companion of wisdom.”
Saint Augustine

Attention-Grabbling Church Signs

*Jesus Had Two Dads
And Turned Out Fine*

Taken From (Apparently Unedited) Church Sunday Morning Bulletins

“Irving Benson and Jessie Carter were married October 24 in the church. So ends a friendship that began in school days.”

Interesting Thoughts or “Facts”

You may have noticed that the Dow Jones hit a record high this past week, as did the S&P 500. Even though only 40% of Americans own stock as a private form of investment, most of us have a pension plan, IRA, etc., that has invested our contributions in stocks and bonds. So, the news that the stock market is doing well is good news for all of us.

However, I am not sure that this is an accurate measure of how our economy is doing, nor is it an accurate measure of how well a lot of individuals and families are doing.

I was deeply moved the past few weeks as I watched television coverage of literally thousands of cars outside of Dallas, Texas lined up to receive food for Thanksgiving. Cars four abreast as far as the eye can see were inching toward the distribution center, where a team of volunteers quickly and efficiently placed a turkey, a bag of potatoes, other vegetables, fruit, milk, and bottled water into the trunks of the cars. I would estimate that it took 4-6 hours for these people to receive their Thanksgiving meal. I was also deeply touched by the spirit of these volunteers.

The day before Thanksgiving, David Abel of the Boston Globe wrote the following:

They’ve come in heavy rain and waited in long lines in the morning cold, some in tears, sharing stories of desperation, of lost jobs, sick relatives, empty bank accounts, a pervading sense of hopelessness as winter nears.

Apparently, on Cape Cod, nearly 25% of the full-time population is food insecure—or lacking, at times, enough to eat. The percentage was 10% before the pandemic hit.

The Greater Boston Food Bank, which provides food to 190 towns and cities in Eastern Massachusetts, cannot keep up with demand. Before the pandemic, about 1 million pounds of food was distributed every week to some 415,000 people. The food bank is currently distributing 2.5 million pounds a week to more than 660,000 people, and the number is rapidly increasing.

Approximately one in seven people in our state are considered food insecure. That amounts to about one million of our brothers and sisters. The food-insecurity rate in Massachusetts has increased 59% since March, *more than it has in any other state!* How can this be??

People are helping. The First Congregational Church of Revere Food Pantry used to distribute 8,000 pounds of food a month. Now, with six times as many families seeking food, it's providing as much as 15,000 pounds—a *week!* The pantry used to give away about 250 turkeys a year. Last weekend, it gave out 750.

We need to remember that while the people at the top of the economic ladder are doing quite well, those only a little way down are not doing well at all, and those further down are in serious trouble. Even a city like Arlington, which is relatively wealthy, is serving 75% more residents through Arlington Eats than it normally does.

We can help. What better way to celebrate our many blessings than by sharing them with those right here in our own state who are in desperate need?