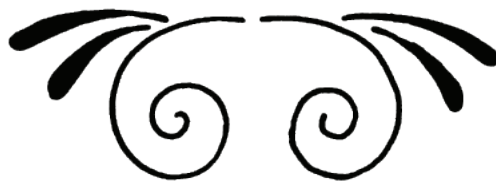


Pastoral Prayers



Rev. Susan Cooke Kittredge

Pastoral Prayer
October 4, 2026

Susan Cooke Kittredge
Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Dear God,

I have in mind a switchback,
that crisscrossing path back and forth
up a steep hill that makes the climbing easier.
The mountain of sorrow is too great for vertical ascension,
we haven't the strength right now
to march straight upward.
Nor can we dwell at the base and pace one more moment
wearing thin the earth beneath our feet
while moaning for deliverance.

Grief is contradictory
we cannot move and cannot sit still
we delight in memories and are broken by them.
Every sorrow is its own breathing creature
an uninvited guest that will not take its leave.
But this one, this one,
feels too much to bear.
Is it greater for its collective weight?
Will the pews sink through the floor
of this sanctuary that has borne centuries of lament?

Ah, your gentle smile knows well our mortal misery
and cups it gently to your breast.

It was your idea the switchback,
the easing of the burden by the support of friends,
century old prayers, ancient words of wisdom,
and songs of solace.
This church is our switchback.
On earth as it is in heaven.

Golden light of maple leaf, sun of glory on the mountain top
autumn's ticking of precious time
calling us to love and turn to the work of the world
before it's too late
calling us to be the rope handline up the switchback
for others to grasp
that together we will some distant day
from the summit of our hesitation
breathe afresh the breath of heaven
made sweeter by our loved one's presence.

Amen.

Pastoral Prayer
September 6, 2026

Susan Cooke Kittredge
Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Dear God,
Neither summer nor full fall
September stretches its arms and legs
the length of precious daylight
languishing in the relief of having done
and the timorous time of not begun,
of summer's harvest presented in abundance
while leaves cling and crinkle
to trees waving in the winds of change.

Resistance is the calling.
Resist time's ticking of intent
resist the calls to become
produce, accomplish and be
other than another of your creatures
in this fickle season
of warm days, chill winds, storms and
calm, in turbulent times of simultaneously
gathering in and letting go---
of surrendering to your wafting spirit
the treasures we clutch to our breasts
the people we must live without
the desperate dreams of more than this.

For this is the day that you have made
may we rejoice and be glad in it
lest at dusk we can't recall
having thanked you even once
for the gift of living. Amen.

Pastoral Prayer

August 9, 2026

Susan Cooke Kittredge

Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Dear God,

High summer has come to the garden
planting stopped, nurturing slowed,
August's intermittent rains drenched fields
and lake and so we pause on the threshold of
full harvest and hold our breath.

Little can we do now but wait and watch,
deadhead petunias and geraniums,
place roses and zinnias
on the kitchen table.
Would that we could peaceful be when time
quiets nature's progression,
but the cicadas have arrived
reminding us of time's relentless pace,
vibrating the air with their incessant electric
tinnitus charge.
For some this is well tuned to lives
of packing for college, school,
of planning fall's full flush of fury.

This time of waiting and advancing,
of pulling back the arms of the clock,
lest one quiet sublime afternoon go unnoticed
or a laugh not linger long enough
to echo in our soul,
this time between
becoming and fading
can break the heart of one
whose days are few
or those who mourn
life's trenchant reminder
that days pass on gossamer wings.

Guide us to the stillness of surrender
that as fruit ripens, petals fall, and pages turn
we may give thanks and cast our eyes
towards the rising sun.
Amen.

Pastoral Prayer

July 12, 2026

Susan Cooke Kittredge

Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Holy God,

This must be it, this day,
this evening coming soon—
when summer's fullness falls to wane.
The meadow can no richer be
with milkweed, vetch and timothy.

The air is so sweet we must brush our teeth for
having breathed.
How much more resonant can the cardinal's
whistle be,
engulfed in leaves of moisture?
How much happier can the laughing brook be
after the relief of rain?

Having waited winter's length for a day such as
this,
dare we see it for what it is?
Or, so caught in summer's rush,
will we more likely say—next week or in a
week or two—
it was not quite mid-July—it was the 12th to be
exact—
when summer was still young and playful
when hope and expectation were in full flush
and young in heart and restless,
we oblivious crushed the clover beneath our
feet.

But give us for a second—
for that is all that we can take—
the eyes of Ukrainian parents
whose children know little but war.

Or LGBTQ+ individuals who live in electric
anxiety and fear

Or a Palestinian child who has known no
home
but a tent in Gaza.

Or our people in this country whose
guts tighten each time they leave home
glancing this way and that for the icy eyes of
apprehension.

Or give us the eyes—again not for long—
of one whose days are numbered few,
of one who knows the fullness of time
is at once gone and coming on.

Lead us, O Holy One, to see with eyes of faith,
to hold tenderly the gifts you so extravagantly
send our way.

Stop us in our tracks that we might breathe
as one who knows the gift of easy breath,
that we might see as one whose vision has
returned,
that we might hear with ears unstopped,
that in all humility
we might love selflessly,
and give as you have given us—
joyfully, lovingly, completely.

Amen.

Pastoral Prayer

June 21, 2026

Susan Cooke Kittredge

Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Dear God,

It's 90 degrees in Galveston Texas.

No doubt it was hot, muggy day in the gulf
on June 19th in 1865

when Union General-Major Gorden Granger
announced to the enslaved that they were free
and had been, by the way, for two years.

In the heat of the moment
with sweat glistening their bodies
and lips cracking
how did they hold
exuberance and fury?
They'd worked for years under false
assumptions,
been lied to, abused
defrauded their rightful freedom.

We too can feel enslaved by
dictators and constraints that bind us
from within and from without.
Bound by fear or substance,

behavior, desires, depression,
dull lethargy,
financial turmoil or hampered bodies,
we cannot find the freedom of your grace
nor fathom that it knows no scowling restraint.

Guide us to settle quietly into ourselves
that we might feel afresh your loving presence
even unto the end of time.

Surely there is liberation in that?
Grant us the courage to claim this promise
lest will we prowl in our cages
with the acid resentment burning throat
and spirit.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Pastoral Prayer

June 14, 2026

Susan Cooke Kittredge

Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Dear God,

Grazing peacefully in the meadow at sunrise
a lone deer caught sight of me
as I walked just within the edge of the woods.
Young she was with ears out of proportion to
her body.

They stood straight up, sensitive sonar instru-
ments of detection.

She was so still that I wondered if
her hide even shivered at a mosquito's bite.

Okay let's play this game of dare,

I too will not twitch.

I've nowhere else to be this summer kissed
melodious morning.

Was she so frightened that she couldn't move
or had time and evolution taught her how best
to dodge demise?

Though we are predators and not prey
we're so inclined ourselves—to freeze in the
face of disaster--
to pray we'll not be noticed, to wait for the
danger to pass.

Lord knows I've done this myself, focused on
one more toothsome morsel, made that my
sole intent rather than confront the threat--
whatever it might be--to our earthly home or
herds of humans near and far.

I won, I suppose, the game of dare.

After three minutes—t seemed like twenty—
white tail flashing in surrender
she leapt to the forest of oblivion.

And I walked on

humbled yet again

that we are--

each and every one--

fearfully and wonderfully made.

Amen.

Pastoral Prayer

May 24, 2026

Susan Cooke Kittredge

Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Dear God,

In spring we wonder at the nights
held back in check by all the light--
a clouded sun that will not stop
its giddy dance on the mountain top,
or keeping score at a baseball game
or casting light for the gardener's gain.
Sure sun will brighten the rainbow's arch
and light the trek of the black ants' march.
So full of itself, this radiant thing
forgets to go to bed in spring.

And yet the nights, though shortened be,
are packed with all eternity
and can it seems without much sleep
make leaves grow full and lilacs weep.
And so we marvel at break of dawn
as we stumble out and heave a yawn
that bridal wreath in one night's time
have burst in bloom and fragrant rhyme.

We stop to fill ourselves with scent
and breathe a breath of holy scent.
Is it the blossoms that we smell
or the phlox that creeps upon the hill?
Could it be the daphne?
And quick we are upon our knees
to sniff pale petals beneath the trees
that shower us in blossoms' fall,

another snowfall over all.

Breathing deep we fill our lungs
with all the sweetness you have flung
to make us pull your Spirit in,
to marvel at the breath of spring.

Yet spring is fickle, frail and sweet
filled both with memories and defeat
of blossoms felled by frost and chill
of loved ones killed on distant hills.
Transplanted soldiers, seedlings bright
who from their homes did venture right
to foreign soil and combat's grip
and from this life their souls did slip
and leave behind their families broken
with folded flag a somber token.

Your ways, O God, are curious fair
and so we ask your loving care
on all who would this day draw breath,
from giving birth to facing death.
May your Spirit fill their tender hearts
with all the love you can impart
and raise all souls to glory sing
the wonders of the breath of spring.

Amen.

Pastoral Prayer

May 17, 2026

Susan Cooke Kittredge

Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Dear God,

Rain, apple trees in full bloom
sun on wet grass---
moisture, time and warmth---
lay the carpet for the queen of mushrooms to
arrive.

Beneath the soil
morels stretch their necks,
lifting the crowns of their spongy heads tall
like children measured against a wall.
They'll not shoot up quickly
but break the surface in the dark, sniff
and then decide-is this the day?

Is this the day to venture forth from safety
to grow, mature, spew spores aplenty?
There's no outsmarting a morel,
we'll never gain the upper hand
nor know for sure their likely habitation or
habitation.

The hunting, hoping, and searching are ritual
enough to feed the soul.
Careful steps in early morning, slow
and deliberate need not the prey acclaim.
There's a measure of sorrow in any harvest
though not enough for us to sheath our knives.

Satisfaction in consumption pales in
comparison to desire.
If I'd to choose between knowing you, God, or
searching for you,
I think I'd pick the yearning, the hungering,
hunting, watching and longing.
Is it enough to know you're dwelling within
and through it all
or must we claim you for our own
and still the search that might have grown
and cut the promise of spreading delight
for one delicious toothsome bite?

Amen.

Pastoral Prayer

May 10, 2026

Susan Cooke Kittredge

Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Dear God,

We berate ourselves for things not done, especially as seasons turn and we feel a rush of “shoulds”: clean the closet, mow the lawn, plant the garden, clean inside and out. Yet all about us creation bids us, “Stop! Look! Listen!” Listen to the birds proclaiming in song the joy of life and procreation. Look at the valley purring with delight in the full flush of its verdant explosion. Stop, lest you miss spring and turn too late to see the petals fallen.

This day we think of our mothers and note that what might be easy, can be complicated. For some this is a day of remembrance, of dwelling in the illusive space of recollection, nostalgia, regret and gratitude. For others it can be a painful day when salt is poured in an angry wound. Yet for some this day speaks of possibility, of growth, of flourishing and becoming even in the midst of exhaustion and worry.

Is this what it's like for you, mother of us all? Do you worry and rejoice and laugh and cry? This day we pray for mothers who are longing—longing for their children from whom they have been separated whether as a result of harsh immigration practices, loss or discord. And for women who long to be mothers but find their dream so far denied. We honor those who have chosen not to become mothers and feel odd this day each year.

Holy God, as spring blossoms into promise, may we too nurture and tend your magnificent creation, from the tiniest insect to the fragile ozone and all that lies within.

Amen.

Pastoral Prayer

May 3, 2026

Susan Cooke Kittredge

Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Dear God,

It seems April will not lose its grip
as if waking slowly from a bitter winter
it forgot to rain
and be warm and withdraw with quiet grace
so May could enter the stage in full flourish.
April's tenacity is curious allowing us time to
consider

how impatience licks with forked tongue
at the edges of our spirits.

Marsh marigolds are beloved in April
and ignored in May as flashier species emerge.
They too dawdled and postponed their arrival.

In this reluctant spring we flirt with
indignation and bitterness—think we might
deserve something more.

As if because this or that has not met our
expectations we're entitled to some relief, some
joy, some warmth.

The time is up, they say,
the war can't go on.
And yet it does,
closing its bony fingers
around a world dismayed
by how hot greed can
freeze souls to ice.
Impatience flips so easily to fury.

But offering us a crumb of bread
you remind us of our
part in transforming small gifts into action
cups of blessing into streams of love.
Tiny purple violets make a feast of
a simple salad, a treasure of confection
a kiss of remembrance.
“Do this, rejoice, give thanks
in remembrance of me.”

Amen.

Pastoral Prayer, Palm Passion Sunday
April 26, 2026

Susan Cooke Kittredge
Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Dear God,

Before the sun reached the meadow
the air was wet and clear
birdsong swung from the budding maples
swooping down and circling back in some
syncopated rhythm reserved for avian wings.
Devoid of human noise
the morning was in full spring swing
busy, intentional, melodious.

When the giant beaver bridged the bank
in low waddle, he was as startled by
Mercy as she was by him though they
were shockingly of similar size—
the border collie and the beaver.

We're always startled by mercy
surprised by unexpected love so sweet
that showers us with forgiveness, grace and
kindness all at once.
It's says something that this surprises us.

It's different from being suddenly frightened.
Startled by mercy—both the longing for it
and its humble acceptance—softens our hearts
makes us weak in the knees.
It's mercy we long for in the hearts of leaders
and the souls of nations.
Would that they, wide and lumbering,
with fangs projecting and slapping tails,
be startled by the soul softening,
tender blessing of mercy.

Still the forsythia turn themselves inside out
the daffodils blow their trumpets
the crocuses croak their swan song
of retreat
as the honeysuckle rises from
the swampy depression
of land and fortune,
a common shrub now spurned
as invasive
yet ever sweet the bees attest
that from God's blessing flows
this honeysuckle rose.

Amen.

Pastoral Prayer, Palm Passion Sunday
April 19, 2026

Susan Cooke Kittredge
Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

We are inclined to resolutions--
New Year's notwithstanding
as it inspires ones rarely kept.

Spring is when we plan
resolutely, minutely
sectioning hours for maximum efficiency
if only to smell air rife with life.

What kept us busy all winter when our world
was frozen?
Whatever did we do with ourselves?

Never mind, forget we asked.

In Gaza
little earth remains unblemished
by destruction
seeds are tucked in rubble
aid is measured in spoonfuls,
children rub their aching bellies.

In Tehran
spring comes in blooms and birds
while death prowls like a lion
outside the doors

of those who can no longer sleep
for fear of bombs
Guilt circles our abundant lives
as we pray for peace elsewhere
while buzzing from task to task,
like honeybees sucking nectar
in the garden of Eden.

But if the butterfly effect is true--
that even the tiniest action
reverberates afar--
then their pain is truly in us
and our prayers in them.

Isn't this how it works?
We are one people, your people
sharing this sweet and aching life,
this too short sip of heaven.

Amen.

Pastoral Prayer, Palm Passion Sunday
March 29, 2026

Susan Cooke Kittredge
Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Out of line

Holy God,
Shoulder to shoulder, seat to seat,
heads bowed down and feet to feet
we sit and listen, sit and pray
and watch unfold this holy day.

Watchers we at this frightening hour
lined up in pews to watch the power
of people's fear make love grow dim
and cry with one voice: "Crucify him!"

Lining streets of Jerusalem,
standing shoulder to shoulder
and feet to feet,
would we have offered an apple to eat?
Would we have reached a hand to wipe
the sweat, the blood, the tears, the fright?
Or turned instead from the bleak sight
and prayed to God, "This isn't right."
And nothing done that wasn't safe
that wasn't meek, that caused a chafe
against the chains we all must wear
when shame's the burden that we bear.

We line up at the traffic light,
we sit in pews this morning bright,
and in the line at the grocery store,
cart to cart we wish for more.
But ever do we fill that cart
with food for those with broken hearts?
Step out of line and help the man
who does not see his favorite can,
who cannot reach the topmost shelf
who cannot save his broken self?

Grant us the courage, give us heart
from expectations to depart
that we may venture out of line
and in your love radiant shine--
one person here, another there
offering hope, offering care,
giving help, standing out
asking why, expressing doubt,
reaching with love to those in need,
that Easter morn we may indeed
proclaim with joy and radiant glee
Christ lives today for you and me!

Amen.

It's not that we're ungrateful for bluebird skies of sun tipped clouds or plumes of snow rising. It's not that fresh against the white the purple finches don't look smart or that the Carolian Wren's crystal call does not stir us with delight. It's not that it's ugly or foul smelling or even exceptionally inconvenient—beyond the break of yet another shovel, beyond the hassle of the roof, and treachery of roads on Friday---it's just that we've had enough of a good thing.

Forgive us, O God, we have been blinded by the snow and chilled by the wind, tempted to think only of ourselves, engulfed by a wall of white, wrapped in our privilege, pillowed by the hills of home. Lead us, we pray, to think beyond our own confines, to have the courage to listen to the stories of those beset by fear and sorrow, starvation and disease, violence and death, those among us whose lives have turned suddenly and inexplicably dark.

And fast upon such idle bickering, we think of Jesus in the desert, confounded and confronted with trials that wore his soul, with a journey that would not end—and we are ashamed, lured by our privilege to turn from thanksgiving to foolishness. And through it all we pray for the courage to turn to you, to lay our burdens down, to admit we cannot by our own will, save ourselves or those we love. We pray for the strength to trust you, to let go, to open our hearts to your redeeming grace.

Fill us this white spring day with hope, paint on our hearts a vision of geranium petals soft to the cheek as a baby's earlobe, wake us to the cooing of the mourning dove, remind us of mammoth marigolds and sticky pink petunias, of mountain trails blown cool in May, of softball, baseball, rushing streams and speckled trout, black fly fury, mosquitoes, warm and sweaty skin, corn seeds and temperamental tractors, hammocks, fresh cut grass and the newborn of spring.

We pray today for those unable to dream, those whose hearts and bodies are weary with the weight trials. May our prayers lift their hearts.

Amen.

Pastoral Prayer
February 22, 2026

Susan Cooke Kittredge
Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Dear God,

Before the wind came up
the snow stretched the long length of locust limbs
piled higher than the tires' rims
capped birdfeeders like the King's Guards before the palace.
All still and quiet after the storm, as if to say,
"There you have it: a perfect snow in winter's solace."

Depth perception vanishes in monotone
it's hard to measure distance
and we are blinded by this bounty of beauty.

Isn't that the truth? In a state so white
of flesh and field we lose sight of our footing in the world
and cannot judge the impact of our press upon the earth.

Thank you, dear Lord, for your spirit,
your wind that blows snow from branches,
our fortunes far afield and lays us bare
though not barren
by any measure the world's grave urgency.

Behold the revelation of blessing and hardship
dependent on the simple count of coin in purse
color of skin, times around the sun, or words upon the tongue.

May we venture forth to clear a path for justice and mercy
in the storm of own travail and the wonder of winter's beauty.

Amen.

Pastoral Prayer
January 4, 2026

Susan Cooke Kittredge
Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Dear God,

Epiphany asks a lot of us.
More than we are able to give
with any mortal measure of generosity or ease.
To be open to an Epiphany
we need lose our grip on time,
on this ticking hour and the next,
this afternoon,
this evening of prepping for the morrow and the week ahead.
Leave the laundry, leave the sheets,
the dishes and the blast computer.
Rumpled ready for salvation
surely more fitting than
starched and pressed.
What then?
Just wait?
Or more than that?
Listen? Smell? Look? Receive?
Consider the lilies of the field?
Consider in sacred time of no beginning and no end
your pulse in all creation?
This is too much, we must sit down.
And still as the snow falls the woodpecker pounds the swaying seedcake,
the drumroll of scarcity driving him to frenzy.
Few creatures on the planet wallow in plenty as we do.
What shall we make of this?
What shall we make of this
biting epiphany? Amen.

Pastoral Prayer
December 28, 2025

Susan Cooke Kittredge
Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Dear God,
At last the cardinal gets the stage.
He needn't sing his lilting melody
nor parade his plumage before
a bandstand of discerning females.
Against the snow set stage,
he need only be his brilliant red self,
need only perch upon the feeder post
or grip a brittle branch
and simply—for once—glance quietly about
and crack a seed to warm his tiny thumping heart.

Between the ending of the year and start of a new
perhaps we too can find a moment to stop
rustling our feathers
and trying to be more.
If you can count the hairs upon our heads,
the feathers in our wings
surely this is enough for us to feel beheld
and seen in all our rumpled plumage.

We need not sing a perfect song
nor solve the world's travails,
repair a broken heart,
be other than we are.
But only rest upon our perch
and cast a soft eye on
your incandescent beauty
and listen carefully for the rugged,
bone cold sound of your beckoning. Amen.

Gracious God,

We have so much to be thankful for, especially this evening swathed in the majesty of music and story we feel your presence close beside us and through us. We are grateful for the traditions we honor; yet this is an odd season where the miraculous is fused with the ordinary and new light is cast on our common lot.

Perhaps the same was true two thousand years ago in that cold, dark barn. We imagine it to make it real, to feel what it might actually have been like. We see and smell a musty night within that small shelter, the hay scattered for the sheep and goats and oxen who stand, shifting their weight from side to side as they eat with intent and growing comfort. The hens, fed, nestled down to their evening brood, spread themselves wide over their clutch of unborn promise.

But it was no doubt not as peaceful as we imagine. For in every barn mortality breathes heavy on the necks of the inhabitants. The fester on the donkey's hoof is hot with infection, she lies down and waits, her breathing labored; the Billy goat can hardly reach the hay on the ground so stiff is he with age and cold. The ewe wanders aimlessly, bleating for her lamb stillborn last night.

Gently, darkness falls and levels sleep on most in the barn. The steady rhythm of chewing and breathing is jolted when the door is thrown open, and the strangers are ushered in with fuss and some sense of urgency. And they are left as quickly as they are brought in. The door is closed, the animals are on their feet, wide awake and nothing in the barn is the same--ever again.

Christmas comes to us in much the same way, to lives ebbing and flowing, to our days of pure delight and those with pain and darkness. We yearn for peace within ourselves and know in the same instant that until there is peace for all, there is true peace for none. Our world is the manger into which your transforming grace is poured. We are a gathering of creatures huddled together for warmth, breathing, dying, frolicking, being born. To know your presence is to see it all differently. To see in the smiles of children and the radiance of song your love revealed, to see in each other's pain your sorrow and tears.

In darkness may we reach for the light and see anew the face of peace.

Amen.

Pastoral Prayer
December 7, 2025

Susan Cooke Kittredge
Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Gracious and Almighty God,

Day fades to night swiftly at this time of year. Finishing lunch and addressing the afternoon, before we know it, the windows change color and turn sapphire blue, heralding the day's depart and the dawn of darkness. How long do they glow that lovely color? Ten minutes? Half an hour? I will make note today. It's a gem slipped into time, a crystal blue gift we overlook by watching clocks and doing—or not doing--this or that. Thank you, God, for this silent insert in our day, this kiss of grace.

Truth be known, we miss it more often than not. Seeing the graying sky we wonder if a cloud has passed by, because it can't be getting dark this early. Perhaps it will rain. Surely it's not night coming on. In our denial we miss the sapphire windows and rising stars.

Dear God, the world is so fast paced, at least our hearing of it, our reading of it, so much is happening, so many suffering in war zones of conflict, draught, floods, famine and cold that we can't pray fast enough.

Still we pray that in the midst of despair and pain, on battle fields and in bedrooms that people are able to see the gems that whisper by on angels' wings, the pauses in time and trial, the sapphire window moments you cast our way.

Help us to find those pauses, those crystal moments between the ending of this and the starting of that, the sapphire still beauty that you have woven in the fabric of our lives: the minutes after awakening and before rising; thanks said before the meal; waiting for tea to steep; patting the dog's soft ear; brushing hair; admiring the wood pile; watching wild turkeys lumber across the field; listening for hoof fall on branch in the forest; seeing Christ in a lit candle, in the face of the tormented, in the winsome look of our beloved, in the tenderness of human touch, in the tears of one bereft and this day, in the quiet wisdom, humility and sadness of our veterans.

Lead us, O Holy One, to know your hope for us and grant us the courage and strength to follow.

Amen.

Pastoral Prayer
November 30, 2025

Susan Cooke Kittredge
Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Loving and Protecting God,

No matter how old or even cynical we are, the crisp cold air of winter infuses us with energy, like a burner on the gas stove that bursts to blue or a close crack of lighting on a summer night. “Awake!” it says. We’re never completely ready for winter; sad if we were. We hold onto the harvest like a lover watching the beloved depart.

Thank you, O Holy One, for making us hopeful, if somewhat foolish, for casting in us an occasional benign neglect of particulars, for it allows us to be surprised and necessitates our being awakened. And hope is what we cling to, sometimes desperately, when things don’t go as we think they should, when systems we trust fail, when people are shot on street corners, fires rage, when greed prevails and the weak and poor are cast aside like stale bread or moldy cheese.

As we begin our Advent journey to celebrate the birth of the hope, grant us the courage to see with clarity everyone and everything around us and within us that needs the healing and renewal of Christ’s love.

Amen.

Pastoral Prayer
November 16, 2025

Susan Cooke Kittredge
Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Thank you, God,
for the muted landscape of November.
Against fractious news, information overload,
burning emotions and frayed nerves,
the dull November hue is a balm,
asking as it does so little of us.

Welcome gray and dusty brown,
black tree trunks and brave bare limbs.
Wind-blown straw
tumbleweed of summer gone
weather neither hot nor frigid,
standing silently against duality.
Not yet winter but neither orange fall:
stick season.
Before *the fluff* of snow and down,
before we burrow in our igloos,
this time, this season,
this classroom for our
learning to be with you.

Lead us into liminal November,
into this gray zone
where holding the past
we cradle the future
where we need not choose
right or wrong,

right or left,
reprisal or surrender,
abdication or complete control.
As conflicts rage
over turf, food and power
we honor all who in small and fearsome ways
courageously walk on shaky ground,
holding with frigid, trembling fingers,
the dream of peace and equity,
the end of violent confrontation,
who hold there to be another way
beyond despair.

Another way, your way
of reconciliation, of stillness,
of more and less,
of roots reaching deep into
the earth for strength,
beneath the frost
beneath the friction
to the wellspring
of your love,
quietly,
this November day.
Amen.

Amen

Gracious and Almighty God,

Day fades to night swiftly at this time of year. Finishing lunch and addressing the afternoon, before we know it, the windows change color and turn sapphire blue, heralding the day's depart and the dawn of darkness. How long do they glow that lovely color? Ten minutes? Half an hour? I will make note today. It's a gem slipped into time, a crystal blue gift we overlook by watching clocks and doing—or not doing--this or that. Thank you, God, for this silent insert in our day, this kiss of grace.

Truth be known, we miss it more often than not. Seeing the graying sky we wonder if a cloud has passed by, because it can't be getting dark this early. Perhaps it will rain. Surely it's not night coming on. In our denial we miss the sapphire windows and rising stars.

Dear God, the world is so fast paced, at least our hearing of it, our reading of it, so much is happening, so many suffering in war zones of conflict, draught, floods, famine and cold that we can't pray fast enough.

Still we pray that in the midst of despair and pain, on battle fields and in bedrooms that people are able to see the gems that whisper by on angels' wings, the pauses in time and trial, the sapphire window moments you cast our way.

Help us to find those pauses, those crystal moments between the ending of this and the starting of that, the sapphire still beauty that you have woven in the fabric of our lives: the minutes after awakening and before rising; thanks said before the meal; waiting for tea to steep; patting the dog's soft ear; brushing hair; admiring the wood pile; watching wild turkeys lumber across the field; listening for hoof fall on branch in the forest; seeing Christ in a lit candle, in the face of the tormented, in the winsome look of our beloved, in the tenderness of human touch, in the tears of one bereft and this day, in the quiet wisdom, humility and sadness of our veterans.

Lead us, O Holy One, to know your hope for us and grant us the courage and strength to follow.

Amen.

Pastoral Prayer
November 2, 2025

Susan Cooke Kittredge
Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Dear God,

Blowing through the end of the week, the wind and rain cut a swath through a glorious fall, laying leaves and branches at our feet. November in its starkness has arrived.

Why is it, oh God, that our love for what we've had is sweetened by its shadow? Why is it that our hearts are quickened by the threat of loss? Why can't we love what we have when we have it rather than when we sense its days are waning?

A green lawn in November can be more treasured than one in May. The last chocolate chip cookie savored as the first was not when plenty lay before us. The final page of a good book greeted with sadness, turned slowly and carefully.

And so we look at our aging friend, our ailing parent and see in their soft skin the dust of their becoming and we shudder in fear and sadness. Across the street or kitchen table, we see one we loved and fear losing and our hearts sink with dread and sorrow.

Guide us, O Holy One, to trust that just as you are here with us today, whatever befalls, so will you be with us tomorrow. Losen our grip on what we fear we're losing and guide us to tomorrow in the sure and steadfast trust that you are already there, laying before us a carpet of maple leaves.

Thank you, God, for this day whatever it may bring and for yesterday and for tomorrow, all blessed and soaked with Christ.

Amen

Pastoral Prayer
October 19, 2025

Susan Cooke Kittredge
Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Dear God,
The basil's deep sweetness is done.
Where has it gone?
Vaporized?
Its leaves have turned as bitter as withering folk
when the sun of life is setting
and chill sinks stalk spine deep.
The basil bounty
of summer is a fragrant memory now.

But thyme's tiny leaves of pungency
withstand the frost with fierce defiance.
"You think I'm small," they say,
"Just give me a crush and you will smell."
The hidden power of the diminutive
best not be dismissed.
When crushed will we too exude our strength
or simply fall to earth's inevitable remove?

And sage, soft lamb's ears of fall
your time has come at last
for roasts of savory splendor.

There's learning in this
that time--no matter how you spell it--
and sage wisdom withstand the bitter winds of
fall, asserting their moment in the march of seasons
proclaiming their strength and power to heal, freshen and renew.

We are some of us small and others wise.
Together we season the hearty stew.
Use us, oh, Holy One, to feed hungry
awaken those resigned to the decay of
democracy, the wilting of joy, the hunger pangs of the innocent.

Amen

Pastoral Prayer
October 12, 2025

Susan Cooke Kittredge
Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Dear God,

Instead
of scrolling catastrophizing news
today we chose to look to Jesus, our faith,
our promise and our hope.

But Jesus' life also was complicated--
rapt in politics, strife, religious fervor
and venomous proclamations.
Stronger than we, he faced the fear and fury,
met adversity head on.
We're just not brave enough to follow.

Our lives are fraught
with turmoil, regrets, sorrows and longings.

Full on confrontation or
ostrich denial are not the only choices.

Instead,
the path of trust lies quietly before us
asking nothing
and everything.

That we walk softly on this earth,
listen, watch, wait, pray
and stand strong in your truth and love.

We pray that peace will hold
yet bombs explode, people die
and saber swords rattle through
psyches and bodies broken.

Instead
We trust you are in the midst of all that is.
Somehow.
With us as we wring our hands,
howl at the moon,
stare in wonder at a maple tree
or sit this Sunday morning
enfolded by others who have chosen to trust--
chosen you.

Instead.

Amen

Pastoral Prayer
October 5th, 2025

Susan Cooke Kittredge
Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Dear God,

The sun is exhaling, breathing out,
resting lower in the sky throughout the day
letting go the clang of summer's high pitched glare.
Is it relieved to turn the volume down,
to sing softly and then hum us into winter's narrow tone?

Fall's golden light makes radiant the leaves---
tall dried grasses glisten silver in reflected rays.
Shadows lengthen, stretching farther into the corn field at dawn and dusk
blocking precious rays from ripening ears.
Time's up, the shadows say, set that sugar, plump those kernels gold
the harvest is nigh.

How shall we—small kernels of humanity—set our sweetness ripe
in portentous shadows of demise?
Not all is gold and radiant.
Dwindling light spills trepidation on those who shiver in the half-light of despair.

Somehow with your unwavering sun
we'll hold this toothsome dilemma:
that the luxury of golden days in which we frolic
is a drumbeat of disaster
for those whose shelter is abandonment.

Let not this thorn our spirits pierce
but prod us into action.
Though sun without is waning
may your light within us glow
to seek the crevices where sorrows grow
and warm one hand of a shivering soul.
Amen.

Pastoral Prayer
September 28, 2025

Susan Cooke Kittredge
Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Holy God,

What a gift the weather has been—soft, cashmere days in bright fall. This can be a bustling time of year when we scurry about like squirrels, some harvesting food, stacking wood, watching the sunset on sports fields, starting new programs for the fall while others think ahead to Thanksgiving. Already. And still others harvest memories in the stillness of their lives. You have given us a comma with this warm month-- a time to catch our breath and pause. Instead of blustery days and chilly nights with threatened frost, instead of fall nipping at our heels, we have had some stillness. And so we think that maybe we won't after all pull up the zinnias but let them bloom their hearts right out.

What seems loudest in the stillness is the chorus of crickets, especially the one behind the stove. A cricket's call is crisp like fall and in the furry comma of extended summer, can seem out of place. Why do crickets come inside anyway? We spend inordinate time sneaking up on them, pouncing on them, releasing them back to the wilderness. We say we're saving them but really we are getting rid of them. Inside they irritate us with their wing rustling, the constant chant we can't understand.

We're busy and haven't time to chase crickets. We are busy and haven't time for many things, for many people. We haven't time to consider deeply what is happening in foreign lands where people speak languages we can't understand. In various ways we try to silence them. They are behind the stove, across political divides, on the streets of large cities, in the detris of our lives heaved in landfills; we try to toss them out. We confess, O God, that we are impatient with those we don't understand.

Thank you for the gift of wayward crickets, for reminding us that the poor, the sad, the lonely are always with us, calling a prayer of constancy. In these gentle fall days, open our ears and hearts to those who need our tender touch and patience. Lead us to search them out and listen to their bleating song.

Amen.

Pastoral Prayer
September 21, 2025

Susan Cooke Kittredge
Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Dear God,

Dear God,

You hear the thoughts and words that trail through our minds, don't you?

The silver threads of whispers, wails and laughter?

Perhaps we needn't say them out loud after all.

When we are old no doubt we'll mutter things we shouldn't.

Speaking can be problematic, cathartic, cleansing and condemning.

Best keep the silence of the holy contemplative order.

Will that be lonely? What happens to all the words not spoken?

Can our bodies hold them without bursting?

Is that what happens to the silenced or neglected?

Do they rupture and spew forth all matter of venomous bile

for having been denied the luxury of someone listening?

Keep not the silence of the cancelled

it turns out words are not free,

but the price we pay for liberty.

Clear our throats, O Holy One,

that with the echo of the Hermit Thrush

we might sing unbound across the land.

Amen.

The Leader of the Pack

I ought to talk this morning about the universality of animal existence, about their essential part in God's creation, about what we can learn from them, what they teach us. After all that's what Jesus suggests in our passage this morning: consider the lilies of the field, listen to the birds of the air.

But sometimes when you're in the thick of something, it's hard to adopt a broad, philosophical—let alone theological--perspective. Ask any parent of a newborn their view on the likelihood that the Fed will reduce interest rates in September and they'll look at you as if you're speaking a foreign language. However, ask them when their baby woke last night and they'll tell you about every single minute.

As some of you know, we got a border collie puppy at the beginning June. I named her Mercy because, well, we all need a lot of mercy. Beware what you ask for because we got A LOT of Mercy. She's not here this morning because she's not quite mastered her social skills yet. She's a great puppy and will be a fabulous dog; in good time. Right now she loves people too much, thinks everyone she meets the most wonderful person in the world, so she jumps up on them with her sharp toe nails. Her other challenge--which is entirely my fault--is that I didn't wait to teach her how to walk calmly on a leash from the beginning. I had to take her for walks to expend her energy just a bit. So now she pulls; she pulls because she can't wait to lick the morning dew from blades of grass or savor some fresh goose poop, or have a chew on a rock. She's a puppy—a living expression of joy--and every day is the best she's ever seen.

Some people I know—maybe most of them—think I was crazy to get A) a puppy and B) a border collie puppy. They are high energy dogs to be sure, but they've always been my soul dogs. Honestly, I could have waited, I suppose, for an older dog, but I felt the need for the exuberance of a puppy. In this time when the weight of the world lies heavy on so many of us, when we are lured by despair and itchy with anxiety, I think our greatest resistance is joy. No matter what plagues you, once you lay your spirit down or your spirit lays you down—and maybe your body as well—the taunting demons of darkness have won. Seek out joy with intention, wherever you may find it: a good book, a creemee, a lake adventure, a hike, a funny joke, a shared meal, a frolic in the hay. Paint a painting, write a poem, sing a song. I got a puppy.

When our dog Tess died in March, I was heartbroken. Many of you know this devastation all too well. I missed her to the depth of my soul and spine for too many reasons to mention. But one thing I learned when she was gone and that has been reinforced since Mercy came, is that what was starkly missing in my life for those three months was the holy depth of silent commu-

nication. I didn't have to tell Tess what I was going to do or how I felt, she knew before I did. We could look at each other and know fathoms deep love, compassion and forgiveness. Without saying a word.

A lot of the time when we pray to God, we fling our prayers out into the air; we send them flying but rarely hear them land. In faith and hope we trust they've somehow found their mark and will be taken into consideration. It's been my experience with animals of various species, horses and dogs being the ones I know best, that in quiet times with them, we see our prayers land; we see them received. And if we're still and quiet enough, if we listen to the birds of the air, if we watch our chickens, rabbits, horses and sheep, the God within us awakens too.

I think that's what we're seeking in loving our animals—a connection to the spirit, the essence of God, the living Christ at work in the world. We long to be in touch with the holiness embedded in all living things. We're looking for God alive in this world; we're looking for the leader of the pack, the one we can trust and follow, our guide and shield. Many people in this country are desperately seeking the leader of the pack. This desperation speaks of a deep disease, an unquietness and agitation of the soul. So it's tempting to jump aboard the latest trend, follow this influencer, star or politician, subscribe to a theory, adopt a new diet, exercise routine or meditation practice. We want relief from the agitation in our bodies and spirits.

We would do well to close down our devices and spend some quiet time with an animal and see how they perceive the world. Temple Grandin is an animal behaviorist and Autism rights advocate. She's done invaluable work with animals and especially in making slaughterhouses more humane. She herself has autism and said, "As a person with autism, it is easy for me to understand how animals think because my thinking processes are like an animal's." She wrote that a horse trainer once said to her, "Animals don't think, they just make associations." To which Grandin replied, "If making associations is not thinking, then I would have to conclude that I do not think." Animals and people with Autistic Spectrum Disorders think by making visual associations and snapshots, not by language. It's long been understood that some people with ASD benefit greatly by a relationship with an animal be it guinea pig, dog, cat or horse. If this is true, then we're all on the spectrum.

I take Mercy for a walk early in the morning, and we're both learning about the loose leash law. It's going pretty well. When we get home and I go to the back of my car and open the trunk, she doesn't jump out. Since we're pretty much the same level, she just sits down and puts her head up on my shoulder, then stares intently at me. Her morning enthusiasm is diminished by the walk and it seems she simply wants to be still and say in her own way, "Thank you, I love you." Which is, if you think about it, pretty much how we all might best start our days, by being quiet with God, the leader of our pack and just saying, "Thank you. I love you."

Grace and Peace.

Pastoral Prayer
August 17, 2025

Susan Cooke Kittredge
Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Dear God,

Dawn comes later
and dusk earlier,
the exuberance of August deflating slightly
by the wane of becoming.
We turn from these portents
to relish glorious summer weather:
tomatoes as luscious as love,
the slurpy delight of taking a bath in a juicy peach,
or plunging into water cool and invigorating.

The crickets are another matter entirely.
There's no denying their nocturnal mating frenzy,
coming into their own at this turning point
when summer's engine slows and
for one brief moment
this season of bounty
holds its breath
and
simply
is.

This liminal, threshold,
this cusp of time before the whistle of fall,
before fullness tips
to ripeness, overflows and downward
tumbles to tomorrow
to another season
to another reason
to give thanks
for what is and has been
and yet shall be.

We'll not lament the crickets' chirping
nor chastise their exuberance in reproducing,
but hear their persistence as
insistence that hope is the growing,
that turning, becoming, evolving,
changing and transforming,
living, aging and dying
we are all part of something greater,
some symphony
given in love by you. Amen.

Pastoral Prayer

August 3, 2025

Susan Cooke Kittredge

Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Dear God,

Sometimes it's easy to pray
and sometimes not.

Sitting with intention before a candle stub
or pausing for mere seconds on a walk
we close our eyes as if to say,
"This time I really mean it."

Either

"PleaseGodpleaseGodpleaseGod"

or

"Thankyouthankyouthankyou."

Praying takes it out of us,
draws some precious elixir from our core
a drop of holy essence reserved only for you
from you.

Is that what tears are?

What of the starving mother in Gaza
parched with dehydration
who cradles her withering child
and has not one single tear left
in her brittle and hollow frame?
Have you abandoned her?
Have we?

Just asking this brings us to our knees
where softly and quietly
the clover quivers in the wind
summoning the honey bee
and the milkweed whistles to the butterfly
swirling her round coquettish self.

Are all prayers calls for connection?

Sometimes you feel so close
and sometimes entirely absent.

We ask too much and too little.

That is our burden to bear
the not knowing of it all.

We come to you this sometime
this morning

hearts beating together

held by one another

our petitions joined.

Can you hear now?

Please God.

Thank you.

Amen.

Pastoral Prayer

July 27, 2025

Susan Cooke Kittredge

Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Dear God,

We come to you this morning aware that some among us soaking up the joy of summer while others are burdened and heavy laden. And beyond our little world, fires rage within and without, wars ravage lives and nations. The word “weather” has forever lost its innocence. No longer are we affected by the weather as much as we affect it. The climate has become our testimony to consumption, the unwitting witness of our blithe spirits, as smoke surrounds us.

Still, our valley is greening up with a little rain and the birdsong is sweet in the moist air and the hydrangeas and roses are acting like they live in England and exploding in bloom.

The melody of summer’s symphony is all but ready to begin, an orchestra of instruments, tuned and waiting to explode into trumpets of squash flowers, piccolo crisp snap beans, trombones of corn, tumbling rolls of potato drums, clashing sunflower cymbals, deep marigold cellos and day-lilies as clear and fragile as a violin.

Help us O Holy One, to hold in our arms both the weight and the beauty of this world, help the one to fold into the other that justice and beauty might replace fury and fright and courage infiltrate denial.

Amen.

Pastoral Prayer

July 20, 2025

Susan Cooke Kittredge

Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Dear God,

Summer's stillness has settled in. Plants dehydrated and limp struggle to open their pores to accept rain. So brittle and weak at first the water just rolls off to the hard, concrete ground, the scratchy, needle grass.

The birds, so frenzied until now, tuck their beaks under their wings at 4:30 in the morning to catch a bit more ruffled sleep. Vanished is the frantic business of staking territory and building nests. Gone too their mating calls of desire.

The moon, lying on its back with feet up, alternates between filling and emptying, breathing in and breathing out. And we, languorous in the heat, are forced to slow a bit, sigh, and put our feet up as well.

Like the moon, we are at times a shadow of ourselves, tight and closed, a sliver in the world seeking not friend but retreat, not exuberance but reserve, a profile slipping through our days. At other times we are full to overflowing and spill our joy like giggling stars in the night sky. We thank you, Gracious God, for being with us in sliver times and full, for resting with us when we feel sad and just letting us be who and where we are.

We pray this morning for people across the world and across town who because of springs that have dried up, money that has dried up, shame or illness, sorrow or war or repression, fear of deportation, find themselves in sliver times. We thank you for your presence with them, whether they know it or not. Lead us, O Holy One, to embody your love and gentleness to those whose hearts, souls and bodies are bruised.

Amen.

Pastoral Prayer
May 25, 2025
Memorial Day

Susan Cooke Kittredge
Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Dear God,

In spring we wonder at the nights
held back in check by all the light--
a clouded sun that will not stop
its giddy dance on the mountain top,
or keeping score at a baseball game
or casting light for the gardener's gain.
Sure sun will brighten the rainbow's arch
and light the trek of the black ants' march.
So full of itself, this radiant thing
forgets to go to bed in spring.

And yet the nights, though shortened be,
are packed with all eternity
and can it seems without much sleep
make leaves grow full and lilacs weep.
And so we marvel at break of dawn
as we stumble out and heave a yawn
that bridal wreath can in one night's time
have burst in bloom and fragrant rhyme.

We stop to fill ourselves with scent
and breathe a breath of holy scent.
Is it the blossoms that we smell
or the phlox that creeps upon the hill?
Could it be the daphne?
And quick we are upon our knees
to sniff pale petals beneath the trees
that shower us in blossoms' fall,
another snowfall over all.
Breathing deep we fill our lungs

with all the sweetness you have flung
to make us pull your Spirit in,
to marvel at the breath of spring.

Yet spring is fickle, frail and sweet
filled both with memories and defeat
of blossoms felled by frost and chill
of loved ones killed on distant hills.
Transplanted soldiers, seedlings bright
who from their homes did venture right
to foreign soil and combat's grip
and from this life their souls did slip
and leave behind their families broken
with folded flag a somber token.

Your ways, O God, are curious fair
and so we ask your loving care
on all who would this day draw breath,
from giving birth to facing death.
May your Spirit fill their tender hearts
with all the love you can impart
and raise all souls to glory sing
the wonders of the breath of spring.

Amen.

Pastoral Prayer
March 23, 2025

Susan Cooke Kittredge
Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Dear God,

There were mosquitos in the house on Wednesday.
In March, for heaven's sake.
Full sun and 70 intoxicating degrees
sweaters not removed, but flung with abandon
doors thrown open, sashes raised
light breaths inhaled in giggles.
What were the mosquitos thinking?
Thank you, God, for our attraction to light and warmth.

Can this be beaten out by fear and wounding?
Does longing thrive in chill or is it killed?
By Friday snow swirled
driven by the March winds of ill repute.
Casting about for the sweater, hat, mittens
hope trembling, wavering in our shivering bodies
how quickly we retreat and borrow back
forgetting joy and honing the vain art of resignation
which, by the way, March will brook not.
“Rest not in complacency,” this month of ides commands,
“nor trust all will be well without some effort
without participation
without prayer, fortitude and courage.”

Instill in us, we pray, strong backs
and resilient spirits
as we tip our faces up to the sun
this chill and windy day
and bid the crazed mosquitos
good night. Amen.

Pastoral Prayer
March 16, 2025

Susan Cooke Kittredge
Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Merciful and Patient God,

It's a relief to be gathered for worship, to leave the frenzy of all that buzzes in our country and the world. Help our minds be as still as our bodies. We've been a bit frenetic of late, listening to news, imagining where our country is going and how.

O, God, How shall we lean into your arms of grace? How might we reach our hands out to soothe those riddled with grief, illness, addiction, depression or worry?

Might it be in song or verse?

A note to one despairing to ask how they are faring?

A painting shared, a flower sent, a story with a comic bent?

We pray that with your help we might indeed quiet our own fears and concerns to consider the needs of others. People across the globe who flee wars—those living in the midst of war—those waiting for health and strength to return, waiting for help, waiting for spring.

Help us take our cue from the birds returning, full of hope and delight. Especially the tufted titmouse who high on a branch enjoins us look outward to the wonder of your creation as he calls, "Seer, seer, seer."

Open our eyes, Lord, that we might see and give thanks even in times of stress, especially in times of stress.

Amen.

Holy God,

We can take the chill this morning, take the wind down our necks because we left the scarf at home, because we thought it was warmer than it actually is. We can take the set back in the waking of the sap, in the waking of the bear, this setback in our tasting spring because we have seen hope. We have seen---before this weekend's regression---the return of the white breasted nuthatch, the white throated sparrow, the bluebirds, the shimmer on the forsythia, the fuzzing of the pussy willows and the golden halo on the weeping willows. We have reveled in the sun, up earlier and stronger each morning, so full of its own radiance that it seems reluctant to withdraw at the end of day. We have seen hope in the bright waxing moon.

Some see a man in the moon, some see a rabbit. Gnarled and dimpled, rumped, swirled and odd, it looks a little like an ear. Is the moon your ear, O God? And just when we think winter---and winter break--- will never end and little cries of desperation slip from our constricted throats, is that you crouching closer to hear our pathetic wailings? Thank you, God, for listening, for caring, for leaning closer when we need you. Here is what we want to say: we feel helpless in the face world events, we shudder at the news. The car is worn out and there isn't money for a new one. Some sons are at the end of their ropes and we can't them; daughters despair. Some of us are losing the fight with addiction. We don't know how to help the people who need us. We shiver helpless when we think of all those who are out in the cold. We don't know how to reach across the economic Teutonic Plates that are separating with increasing speed. Some of us worry that we are losing our minds; some of us worry that we are losing our friends. Some of us worry that we are losing our children.

But listen, God, while we have your ear, here is also what we want to say: thank you. Thank you for being here, for shining forth in the curly hair of six-year-olds, in the lamb soft skin of our elders, in the unbridled happiness of puppies, in a good book, a beautiful painting, in music that stirs and soothes our souls, in the touch of human skin, in the eyes of our beloved, in tears of sorrow and joy, in forgiveness and patience, in the generosity and love of all gathered this morning for worship.

Amen.

Pastoral Prayer
February 2, 2025

Susan Cooke Kittredge
Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

The slate gray junco, appropriately dressed for winter
did not succeed in alluding discovery
when he flew into the picture window
just after daybreak
and lay heart beating on the
fresh snow amid the thorny rose bushes.

The thump reverberated
like the waning sound of a kettle drum
a warning across the land
“Be careful, watch out.”

What to do with the broken bird—
stunned and terrified,
naked and alone?

Bring it in by the fire
and risk its heart stopping from sheer terror?

Though prayer is not enough
it's all I have in my tool box now
hunched in the snow, face raw
from unrelenting wind
fearing the ICE storm forecast,
I commend this tiny bird
and all winging, vulnerable
migrants and creatures near and far
to your care.

Is this an abdication of participation?

On our knees in the cold, as stunned as the junco
by the hard force of reality,
we offer ourselves as well as the bird.
Calm our hearts, lift our wings
set our beaks towards the warming sun.

By noon the bird is gone
taken by force of life or foe
I do not know
as heading back to heated hearth
I wrap a scarf
of relief and
the shame of neglect
warm and snug around my neck.

Amen.

Pastoral Prayer
December 24, 2024
Christmas Eve

Susan Cooke Kittredge
Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Dear Loving and Generous God,

We know it's right and good
to lean towards less in this season of exploding consumption:
fewer ornaments, perhaps no Christmas cards,
wood, glass or fabric instead of plastic—
Lord, save us from plastic--
lighter footprint on precious snow
softer touch on the heart of this pulsing planet.

And still we've scurried and prepared
to make our dwellings ready,
swept the hearth
filled the air with smells of bread and broth,
illuminated trees with tiny lights
that you might find your way to us.
Here we are! Come to us, sweet Jesus!

Yet, in Ukraine light is scarce
and hearths are cold,
the smell of stew vanishing quickly
in houses without windows.

Palestinians struggle to remember
peace, if ever they knew it.
The air about them filled with prayers
as they breathe around the lump of grief lodged thick in their throats.

Jews labor under the weight of remembrance,
a legacy of annihilation, corrosive fear
morphed to violence.

Across the world
mangers afluff with soft down or charred rubble
await your miracle of manifestation.
Beyond measures of reason
in ways only you understand,
we trust that tides of turmoil and
seas of sorrow will part,
that light will stream through the tiniest pinhole
to illumine the shattered and the resplendent.

Every body, every soul,
Every joyful or weeping heart
is a manger for a miracle.
Thank you, dear God, for showing us again
that you are born afresh each day
in our rising and in our dreaming
to every straight or buckled soul.

Keep watch, dear Lord, with those who work, or watch or weep this night, and give your angels
charge over those who sleep. Tend the sick, Lord Christ; give rest to the weary, bless the dying,
soothe the suffering, pity the afflicted, shield the joyous, and all for your love's sake. Amen.

Pastoral Prayer
December 8, 2024

Susan Cooke Kittredge
Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

The Advent Visitor

It matters little what is happening inside the house,
whether meals are being cooked, or shows streaming,
someone laughing still or crying more,
we are brought up by the knock on the door.
So placing down the fork, or rising from the couch,
we pause a moment and know uneasiness,
know apprehension, though there should be none,
know we're not looking our best,
know that we've been caught at rest.
And so less than we had hoped we'd be
we go to greet this guest, this stranger in our kingdom.
Advent comes like a stranger, a hollow knock on the door.
We had been making lists and thinking Christmas;
we are a bustle with demands, regrets,
hopes and sorrows,
we have no time for something more.

Into a house beset by mess and preparation,
filled with illness, loss or laughter
comes this stranger who pulls out a chair
and sits right down at the kitchen table.
The gaul of it, we think, but mind our manners.
What can we do for you? we ask,
a tightness in our jaw.
What can we offer you?
Why are you here?
Impatient, we want this over with.

But Advent has come to stay a while,
to sit in the kitchen and simply be.
What do you want from me? We are confused.
What can I do for you? Why are you here?
When will you go?
Perhaps the answer lies in Advent's silence
and in our questions,
in our wondering what is going on
and what might be asked of us.
Holy God, grant us patience with this
uninvited guest.
May we learn hospitality
may we see who you would have us be;
may we hear our questions as invitations.
Help us to be still with this silent one,
quiet in the chaos.

We will draw up a kitchen chair
and sit a while as well.
Maybe the strange peace will fill even us.
Maybe, just maybe, we will be so calm
that when the knock comes again at our door
in the middle of the night
some weeks from now,
we will with full and joyful hearts welcome in
The Prince of Peace.

Amen.

Pastoral Prayer
December 1, 2024

Susan Cooke Kittredge
Charlotte Congregational Church

Almighty and Redeeming God,

Some of us come this morning like lions after a kill, stuffed and slow, more inclined to languish off the feast---to sleep a day or two---than face the new day and season bright and eager. Others come relieved this holiday is past because for one reason or another it was lonely, lonely maybe even in the midst of family, lonely because someone or something was missing, lonely just because.

Whether fresh from giving thanks with gusto or with a nod, we enter Advent hesitantly. We're reluctant to get on the train to Christmas, reluctant to make lists, to start a tally of all we think we should do. Like dried corn stalks bending in the muted field, we stand weakly against the wind of change, our heads bowed, arms flapping in the gusts of coming storms.

Lead us, O Holy One, to find solace and peace in the midst of these coming weeks. Lift us from our lassitude to intentional calm, from reluctance to expectation, from a focus on our lives to a focus on you.

We hold in our hearts all who are displaced this Advent season, all who have lost their homes in this land and abroad, and all who have lost their way though they inhabit familiar surroundings. May you find them in shelters, parks, alleyways, deserts, foreign cities, behind locked bathroom doors, looking out the window, walking in the woods, sitting in their cars, staring at their screens. May you fill them for one brief moment with your grace that they may turn and wonder at that surge of hope, that flash of light, that skip of spirit. Instill in us all as we approach Christmas morning, the gift of wonder, the ability to perceive you in winsome, fleeting and eternal ways.

Amen.

Pastoral Prayer
November 17, 2024

Susan Cooke Kittredge
Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Almighty and Loving God,
We would do well to pay attention to what you put before us,
to heed animals prepare for cold and dark,
storing up provisions in roots, trunks and flesh,
to note the stilled growth of grass and bush
lest fresh shoots be nipped by chill and frost.
So too we store up provisions and protection
against the cold of winter.

But the trees drop their leaves.
When wind grows fierce
and flurries sting and ice bites bark,
they drop protection, stand leafless
with arms outstretched to all
that winter might bring on.
Should it not be the other way around?
Wouldn't it be better
to fluff up with green parkas in winter
to stay warm in the bitter weather?

Is there a lesson in this deciduous dilemma?
Brave trees, for sure.
Or foolish plan.
We think of our lives and how—unlike the trees—
we rush to shield ourselves from pain and discomfort:
turn up the heat, pile on the down, swallow the pills,
pour a drink, open the fridge,
keep so busy we have no time to think
or cry,
talk so much we needn't listen,
leave so we don't have to stay.

Might we learn a lesson from the trees
and might it be that if we raise our arms to you,
naked flesh of our fragility,
bare fingers,
twisted limbs, cracked branches and all,
that only you will be our protection and our shield?
And chill though we may be--
eyes tearing and trunks creaking in the wind,
we will be free to live as you would have us,
uncluttered, clear and honest,
straight and tall in faith.

Thank you, dear God,
for the lessons of the fall.
Open our eyes and help us walk the path you lay
in fallen leaves and faithful trees.

Amen.

Pastoral Prayer
October 27, 2024

Susan Cooke Kittredge
Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Dear God,

Golden locust feather fingers
wave adieu
and lay themselves down
upon the chill wet grass
to nap into decay and spring's elixir.

Maple leaves lie like saucers
on the ground
cupped and curling receptacles
catching dew drops
staving off for one more day
the inevitable crinkle of demise.

Beech, birch, butternut, buckeye
apple, pear and peach
relinquish their summer frocks of green
without fanfare--or so it seems.

Not so the Oak.
Tenacious, determined
it clutches every leaf
though western winds whip them inside out,
they rustle in defiant applause.

Do the other trees mock this dissident in the forest,
this one who will not surrender to the whims of winter?
This fool who insists there is yet more light to feel,
more rain to guzzle, more growing to do.

Job--in spite of it all---
kept asking God for more,
more meaning,
more living in the light
more sense to be made of
a life blown by cruel fate
or some—God forbid--
malicious intender.

It may be February before
the brave oak lets go
its golden hands.
So the time between
the end and the beginning—
between fall and spring
death and rebirth---
shall be a nap into nativity

once again.

Amen.

Pastoral Prayer
October 13, 2024

Susan Cooke Kittredge
Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Dear God,

The weather this past week was beyond belief, still summer with gardens carrying on and zinnias as loud as cymbals...and though we relish every degree day unit, we are slightly uneasy. We know it cannot last, for over that hill, just on the other side, circling at the foot of the mountain, swirling over the lake, the cold wind is gathering, and sniffing us out. We smell it more than feel it, a deep breath in early morning tells all.

We stare at our surrounds, holding in vain to that which is quietly withdrawing, leaving, retreating, the leaves on the trees, daylight upon wakening, warm days and nights. Reaching back to July, we yearn for the green and easy days when time napped and the sun grew round day after day.

We are uneasy with changing lives, our breath is shallow, and we resist what seems a foot. We cringe at indifference and remember passionate, happier times. Surely that was not a cold shoulder that brushed us past; she is my friend, he is my son. From a world twisting in resistance, writhing in pain, we hold ourselves in and cringe at what seems like the inevitable destruction of the climate, hurricane after hurricane, spreading war in the Middle East and divisive, acrimonious, loud and unrelenting chatter in our country.

O Holy One, grant us the courage to face that which frightens us, to pray without ceasing and work for justice and peace, at home and beyond and marvel at the beauty of this day. Amen.

Pastoral Prayer
October 6, 2024

Susan Cooke Kittredge
Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Dear God,

Instead of scrolling catastrophizing news
we look to Jesus, our faith,
our promise and our hope.

But his life too was complicated
rapt in politics, strife, religious fervor
and poisonous proclamations.
Stronger than we, he faced fear and fury,
met adversity head on.
We are just not brave enough to follow.

Our lives are fraught
with turmoil, regrets, sorrows and longings.

But it's not one or the other is it?
Full on confrontation or
ostrich denial are not the only choices.

Instead, the path of trust lies quietly before us
asking nothing
and everything.
That we walk softly on the earth,
listen, watch, wait, pray
and stand strong in your truth and love.

We cannot trust that peace will reign
as bombs explode, people die
and saber swords rattle through psyches broken.

Instead, we trust that you are in the midst of all that is.

Somehow.

With us as we wring our hands,

howl at the moon,

stare in wonder at northern lights

or sit this Sunday morning

enfolded by others who have chosen to trust--

chosen you.

Instead.

Amen.

Pastoral Prayer
September 22, 2024

Susan Cooke Kittredge
Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Dear God,

Were they pilgrims—
travelers with purpose and destination—
we would venerate their journey.

But they are refugees fleeing bombs,
exploding pagers, missiles and malice.
They run, walk, hobble or hitch
not to something but away from disaster
in Gaza, the West Bank, Lebanon.

We cannot imagine this,
we who wake to muffins and cappuccino.
Yet, along our own roads, a stream of refugees
moves frightened and defeated.
Evicted, cast off
like leaves from trees
swirling in the untethered turbulent
wind of endings,
remembering shelter, aching for a bed,
shivering in the night,
crunching chips for dinner
and making empty promises to frightened children.

Lord in your mercy,
Grant us some clarity
that we might each
be a pilgrim with purpose
a small candle of hope
for just one person whose path is dark and cold. Amen.

Pastoral Prayer
September 8, 2024

Susan Cooke Kittredge
Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Dear God,

We gather this morning, winging our way from summer to fall routines, from travel to settling home, from a somewhat scattered flock to a community encircled. As we look forward in expectation, we are stilled by the image of those who gather in Winder Georgia to grieve and weep. We cannot pretzel our minds to understand the shooter's twisted mind and soul; we can only proclaim that light shines in the darkness and the darkness does not overcome it. We pray for renewed strength to press for more stringent gun control laws.

And in the back of our throats there's long held whimpering wail as we approach Wednesday's date. 9-11 carries with it the weight of the world struggling towards a brighter tomorrow, especially in Ukraine, Gaza, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, Darfur and on.

Dear God, help. Help us to anticipate joy and not disaster. Lead us to see your love as the backdrop and grounding of our lives. Teach us to live with gratitude and reverence, for every day is a gift. Take from us the drum beat of fear that rests in all our hearts: fear for our loved ones, fear for our own health, fear of losing what we have, fear of not having enough money, shelter, food, fun. Fear of being found out, fear of being alone. Be our shield and stay and help us to live honestly and truthfully, no matter what transpires.

Grant us the courage to go forth in hope and helpfulness to proclaim justice and mercy, to rejoice in those today who have joined us here in the faith and family of Christ, to ride for those compromised, to march with those oppressed, to dream with those who are threatened, to weep with those who mourn and to sit quietly with the bewildered. Christ within us, still our vibrating spines and bless us, your beloved and humble children.

Amen.

Pastoral Prayer
September 1, 2024

Susan Cooke Kittredge
Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Dear God,

Crickets set a good example
Of what? is the question.
Foolishness? Courage? Industry?

If we too rubbed our wings together
we'd all have better posture--
stand straight and ready
brave and sure.

Crickets call for love, for mates,
for procreation, for the next generation.
Pure and not so simple.
“Here I am,” the dapper male announces
thus pinning his location for females and for foes.

Why is this so often the case? Proclaiming desires
makes us vulnerable. So frogs, bird and bats
come for breakfast or dinner, crunching cricket crudite
or, joy of joy, girl crickets arrive with skirts aruffle and hearts aflutter.
It's a gamble this speaking out, this coming out,
this laboring for love.

Ode to the crickets
daring to sing for the sake of love
laboring on in
wild and ardent hope
calling in the night
“Here I am!
Come join me in this
dangerous
blessed life,
and we shall of this moment make
a sprinkling of eternity.” Amen.

Pastoral Prayer
August 17, 2024

Susan Cooke Kittredge
Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Dear God,

Whether smoke from Canadian wildfires
or rising damp from soggy ground,
the air is dense
shortening our view
bidding us tread slowly
towards summer's decline
lest we miss August's bloom of bounty.

Moving—whether running, marching, hobbling or
hitching—is a problem in itself.
We are plagued from without and within
by injunctions to
move more
do more
be more.

You alone adore us for who we are right now—
lame, lonely, frantic, dashing, distracted, denying or delighting.

You whisper so gently on the peach fuzz of our ears lobes
that we think you stray hair or fly flutter.
This moment, full of problems and potential
is thick with your presence.

We are reluctant to grasp the gravity of your love
until someone or something brings us up short
with tears, laughter, fear or fury.

A small frog frozen in terror on the wet stone step
prays harder than the cardinal's congregation.
Please, God, let me be neither trampled nor eaten.

Is that not the prayer of so many?
Help us consider with care and intention
how to love and serve one another
beautiful, speckled hopping, hoping, praying
frogs that we are. Amen.

Gracious and Ever-loving God,

How full of life and promise is spring; the earth soaks up delicious rain and rushes forward as we too flow ahead to greet the coming bloom. And yet on the way to tomorrow, we are stopped by yesteryear. Somewhere between the house and garden a bleeding heart is cropping up, fresh and tender green, shoots unfurling—reaching sweet and pale to the sun. Our hearts are apt to bleed, to weep as well. We are tender shoots, easily buffeted and burned by our surrounds, by the sorrow and pain about us, by memories and stirrings of what has been. Our hearts bleed and bloom together all at once. How can this be?

Forget-me-nots are coming in, spreading across the beds like the wild flowers they are, calling us not to forget but to remember. . . .what? To remember whom? To remember that we do all this in remembrance of One who has come and gone and comes again. “Do this in remembrance of me.” Forget-me-nots, wild, blue and clear as sparkling tear drops in the sun. Sweet Jesus, we promise to remember; we will forget-thee-not. Neither shall we forget those in whose love we have seen your face reflected.

Surrounded by narcissi, by our inclination to focus in, to dwell upon our own reflection, bright and red the tulips come. They call us to look out and love out and cherish our loved ones with luscious kisses and paths of petals.

And around the porch post, a work of art and delicacy, small tendrils reaching out on trumpets of glory, the columbine. In spite of all that has happened the columbines will bloom again and stand tall on strong stalks against the howling wind. For love is stronger than hate and your love, O God is our salvation.

We pray today for all who thirst for your presence and sweet peace. For those who are ill we implore your healing. For all who are lonely, we ask companionship. Sustain those who struggle for peace. Where people can't make sense of their suffering, shine a small light into their hearts. We pray for those who are hungry and homeless, for those wracked by war and injustice, those who wrestle with morality and efficacy. Renew all who suffer and nudge us all to love more fully. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

Gracious and Revealing God,

The hills are humming with swelling buds and the fields and lawns have greened, yet the cold of spring can be chilling, reminding us not to get too cocky. Time and again we have awakened ever hopeful and left the jacket on the peg---only to shiver through the day and turn our backs to the wind. Sunny mornings can tease our spirits as clouds roll in.

Still strong in spirit--undefeated and even defiant--some part the cold, damp earth and plant a row of spinach, peas or lettuce and blow a hot blessing on such a foolish act. Others, seasoned by experience and past failures, chide those who sow and warn that nothing will come of planting early, that only warm soil frees the seeds.

Here is what we are thankful for today, dear God, that even when our hearts chilled, clamped shut like clam shells beneath the sand of sorry circumstance and turbulent seas, even then--mostly then--you plant seeds of hope. So that when all seems lost, when storms do not abate and hardship persists day after day, you call us out of ourselves, out of our shells to feel warmth in the gentle touch of someone's hand, to know joy in child's delight, to find you alive in the world, preparing a place for us. But you call us not only to receive but to give; you call us with birdsong and flowers, with spring fever and lengthening days, with music and stars and rushing streams; you try so hard to stir our souls, we cannot help but be thankful.

And so we venture forth to find you, sprung from the tomb, working miracles in simple lives day after day. Amen.

Pastoral Prayer

April 7, 2024

Susan Cooke Kittredge

Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Dear God,

An earthquake shook the eastern seaboard
more likely vehicles marching to the path of totality
than tectonic stretching.
Crowds heading to our patch of earth
to look up as darkness creeps upon the face of the sun.

We have shadows, clouds and night each day.
Rays of light are often blocked by sorrow
shadows of misfortune dim our surrounds
shorten our horizons more than bears recalling.

It can't be darkness we are craving then.

Infrequency, rarity, celestial perspective
a glimpse of time's parting kiss
as the moon heads on its way?
Maybe time's winging mystery has us in its talons.

There are three in this dance:
Grand sun diminished by distance
a moon in a moment of magnificence
an earth where rays of sun and moonbeams
fill earthy loam and tender souls.

You, O God, are our light, our source, our sun
Jesus our moon at once so powerful yet scripted to demise,
this planet impregnated with mortal love,
Christ's promise of shadow's transience,
the Spirit dancing always in holy rings of joy. Amen.

Pastoral Prayer
February 25, 2024

Susan Cooke Kittredge
Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Dear God,

The lessons of the maple are legion
they take a break
after the Broadway show of fall—
the costumes, the pomp and splendor
waving and dancing drain their trunk and limbs.

Retreating within,
relishing the cold and dark
do they engage in self-reflection?
What does a maple tree think about
in the winter?

But now, renewed, tickled by the sun
the press of spring rises within
it's pressure we are told
that makes the sap rise.
Rise, yes, not fall.

Hold on to that.

We too take a break after the rakes are stored in fall.
Whether reveling in the cold or burrowing in
we're prone to contemplation in the dark.

Sun wakens our inner sap as well
we feel it stirring.
Is this the Christ within us?
Rising from the ground, from
the roots of our engendering
flowing up our branches,

sweet sap of love and hope
resistance in the face of
chill wars and frozen hearts—
even in the face of our own rigid, lonesome
souls—
you press us to move to engage
to share the sweet tincture of love
call us to love
to serve
to remember
the joy and wonder of
this earthy mortal life.

Amen.

Pastoral Prayer
January 7, 2024

Susan Cooke Kittredge
Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Epiphany

Epiphany asks a lot of us.
More than we are able to give
with any mortal measure of generosity or ease.
To be open to an Epiphany
we need lose our grip on time,
on this ticking hour and the next,
this afternoon,
this evening of prepping for the morrow and the week ahead.
Leave the laundry, leave the sheets,
the dishes and the blast computer.
Rumpled ready for salvation
surely more fitting than
starched and pressed.
What then?
Just wait?
Or more than that?
Listen? Smell? Look? Receive?
Consider the lilies of the field?
Consider in sacred time of no beginning and no end
your pulse in all creation?
This is too much, we must sit down.
And still as the snow falls the woodpecker pounds the swaying seedcake,
the drumroll of scarcity driving him to frenzy.
Few creatures on the planet wallow in plenty as we do.
What shall we make of this?
What shall we make of this
biting epiphany?

Amen.

Pastoral Prayer
December 3, 2023

Susan Cooke Kittredge
Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Holy One,

This week did the roses in.
Wind, snow and hard frosts
caused even the most intrepid blossoms
to hang their wilted, courageous heads in surrender.
Trusting in November mornings
was foolish or inspiring
probably both.
Their fall has no meaning
but a call to witness softly
time's cruel and kind duplicity.

Bending towards the still warm earth
long green stems bear witness to
summer's becoming
to one bush's frolic with immortality.

Yet down the thorny branch
a sweet and healthy bud
pale pink petals cupped tight
together like hands in prayer
is still intent on life
in the face of fall's brutality.

For Lo how a rose e're blooming
From tender stem hath sprung.

Stepping into Advent
a time of waiting and coming
we pause in the doorway
and turn around to what has been:
glory and catastrophe,
tenderness and war,
love and loss.

With hearts bruised and beating
we reach for you.
Hold us, we pray, as we cross the threshold
of fear into the dawn of becoming
frail petals on the winds of change.

For Lo how a rose e're blooming
from tender stem shall spring.

Amen.

Pastoral Prayer
November 12, 2023

Susan Cooke Kittredge
Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Thank you, God,
for the muted landscape of November.
Against the news of war, information overload,
burning emotions and frayed nerves,
the dull November hue is a balm,
asking as it does so little of us.

Welcome gray and dusty brown,
black tree trunks and brave bare limbs.
Wind-blown straw
tumbleweed of summer gone
weather neither hot nor frigid,
standing silently against duality.
Not yet winter but neither orange fall:
stick season.
Before the fluff of snow and down,
before we burrow in our igloos,
this time, this season,
this classroom for our
learning to be with you.

Lead us into liminal November,
into this gray zone
where holding the past
we cradle the future
where we need not choose
right or wrong, Israel or Palestine,
reprisal or surrender,
victims or vulnerability.

As current wars rage,
we honor all veterans who fought for liberty
not annihilation, who put themselves in
harm's way because they held,
with conviction and
frigid, trembling fingers,
the dream of peace, the end of violent confrontation,
who held there to be another way
beyond their present reality.

Another way, your way
of reconciliation, of stillness,
of more and less,
of roots reaching deep into
the earth for strength,
beneath the frost
beneath the friction
to the wellspring
of your love,
quietly,
this November day. Amen.

Pastoral Prayer
October 22, 2023

Susan Cooke Kittredge
Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Dear God,

Thank you for calling us outside
away from screens and screams
from words that bring no peace
only despair and confusion.

We have been nurturing a headache for two weeks
feeding it news and opinions;
it's thriving on this diet of derision.

Thank you for calling us outside to the honey locust tree--
not as flashy as those proud maples—
but with tiny, wet, wilting digits of gold
they call us to marvel
at the gentle surrender of summer green.

This soft tree's relinquishment of leaves bears consideration
as we gather in for winter, store up, shore up, protect
and stack provisions against coming cold.

Bring on the cold, ice, wind and snow the trees proclaim.
We'll slow down and trust in the eternal rhythm
and save our sap for spring.

Help us, O God, to quiet our minds and rest
in your grounding love that warms us through
the cold without
and the cold within.

Amen.

Pastoral Prayer
October 15, 2023

Susan Cooke Kittredge
Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Dear God,

In perfect formation the geese are flying south
taking turns at the bow, the vertex
heading to safety for the winter
the lead goose retiring to the back of the flock
to catch her breath and rest her wings
just long enough to carry on.

Fleeing south, stumbling through dust
with pots clanging and children crying
Gazans also head south.
Away not from approaching cold
but from the heat of fire bombs and fury.

Would that they could fly like the geese above it all
to safety.

The nests of summer promise lay abandoned
in trees, bushes and bluebird houses
Kibbutzim of settled flocks driven from home
not by weather but by possessed predators of partition.

The quiet and emptiness of fall has been filled
with terror, violence, war, fear and lament.
Birds are silent in this season of turning
but our souls now wail on the winds of sorrow.

We could turn to you and pray for peace
but that would be too easy
to hand our troubles over like laundry to be folded.

Knowing you are in the midst of chaos
stemming the tide of terror
blessing the dead
shadowing the killers,
cradling the hostages
we pray not to but for you
trusting that you are
in the hearts, bodies and souls
of all oppressors and oppressed.

May your eternal and everlasting love
rise within souls clenched in anger and fear
that they might fall back
away from the arrow of assault
the vertex of conflict
to feel the possibility of peace
stirring in their hearts and bodies
and know your sustaining presence
in the crossfire as we know it
on the cross.

Amen.

Pastoral Prayer
October 1, 2023

Susan Cooke Kittredge
Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Dear God,

September was blissfully dry and warm with clear skies and starry nights. A marked relief from a summer of rain. We reveled in short sleeve shirts, crèmes, kayaks and cookouts. Lucky we have been and that is all, neither blessed nor more deserving, just lucky. We've stayed north of the rain, ahead of the frost, bathing still in fresh tomatoes, corn on the cob, another batch of pesto, everything more delicious because it's extra, free, beyond expectation, a bonus at a time of year when aging plants like aging people shrink. We love getting something for nothing, it makes us giddy and happy.

Gracious God, help us, we pray, to understand that this joy at the reception of bounty can sometimes harm others. Certainly it is right and good to delight in days of beauty, but our hunger for more bears careful watching. Help us as we give thanks for abundance, to remember those who have so little. Whether as a result of hurricanes and storms, a changing climate, of war, of dictatorships or repression, unjust policies, or misguided politics. Much of the world weeps as we wipe the butter from our chins. And as we do not deserve the extra, so they are not undeserving. Help us, we pray, to find ways to share our harvest of education, money, good fortune and love. Lead us to set a table where all are welcome, to gather about us those whose hearts pine for protection, whose plates rattle empty from lack of food or friends, from lack of love, whose souls are weighted down.

And today, as we bless Hadley into full ministry, may she go forth never letting go of your hand.

Amen.

Pastoral Prayer
August 27, 2023

Susan Cooke Kittredge
Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Dear God,

Would the animals consider
a blessing of the humans service?
They are patient with our slim sensory selves
and thus might pray for our acceptance and strength.

Meanwhile the flies,
with thermometers on their antennae,
cruise toward comfort
as mosquitos aim for carbon dioxide
emanating from our warm bodies.

Do our loud voices hurt animals whose
hearing rests in the ultrasonic range?

Our olfactory compromise
must be laughable to dogs
who smell dinner a mile away
and our sorrow before we shed a tear.

Staunchly forward seeing, we alter the world
to suit our vision,
lighting the night,
condemning turtle generations
and disorienting migrating birds.

In humility and thanks
may we let ourselves be led
by the creatures who see and hear
and sense your wonders beyond our scant imaginings.

Amen.

Pastoral Prayer
August 19, 2023

Susan Cooke Kittredge
Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Dear God,

What are the heavens telling us?
The glory of God the song says
a distant dismissive, if you think about it.

The waxing crescent moon this week
was tiny and intimate, a whisper
of its rounding self
inviting us
laughing as--
taken aback by this salmon glowing globe
on the western horizon
we thought for just a second
it was the sun.
(That had, incidentally, gone down an hour earlier.)

Did the moon chuckle at the joke?
That's too big a question
too much anthropomorphism
to weigh down a simple encounter.

Speaking of questions, what about that question mark
in the galaxy that Webb found?
An accident? A random confluence of stellar alignment?
Actual language in the stars?
Who wrote it?
Who hung the question?

Thank you for lifting us briefly
from the earthly muck of floods and fires

from grief and grime
regret and remorse
the tedium of our self-regard
to the light air of wonder
the possibility
that the heavens are telling us
some glory we can barely imagine
that brings a smile
to the side lying moon
resting softly on a pillow of stars
waiting for us to notice
waiting for us to question
waiting for us to accept
your love.

Amen.

Pastoral Prayer

August 6, 2023

Susan Cooke Kittredge

Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Dear God,

Much of our country is sweltering; people are faint from heat, fearful of the future, as are we all.

Close to home in our own little world, we are grateful for this sunny day and a break in the rain. Remind us as we gripe about a wet, hot summer how verdant our land is; ours is not a land of cracked earth, parched and dying people and animals. Make humble our hearts when some lament busy lives while others are alone and spend their days staring and waiting. Paint smiles upon our faces that we might celebrate the joy of small things, of blueberries and marigolds, of conquering beans and yard long zucchinis, of new notebooks and pencils, of baseball, cooling rivers, an inviting lake, cookouts, cremees, kayaks and friends.

Remind us, O God, that you feed our souls through the gift of this creation, that you sit with us in our darkest nights, nourish our roots and cause our hearts to blossom. When we are firmly anchored in you, no wind can crack our trunk, no drought dry our spirits, no flood drown our hope. Thank you, God, for the gift of your son Jesus, who made real the beauty of this life, your presence in calamity and the ever renewing power of love.

Amen.

Pastoral Prayer

July 23, 2023

Susan Cooke Kittredge

Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Dear God,

The land is belching.
Not burping politely with leaf paw over lips,
expulsing from gorged innards
the effluent of microbial growth
fed by excess moisture.
Don't swim
don't drink
boil here, not there
some water past redemption.

A robin yanks a fat, juicy worm
from the sponge once known as lawn.
The birds are ecstatic at the insect population explosion
singing in the morning as though it were early May.

California rejoices in filling lake and streams
Vermont dreads one more rain drop.
It's hard to hold blessing and curse at the same time.

We too can feel soaked in beauty, lucky beyond imagining
glutted with riches yet still afflicted with doubt and trials
pain and fear.

Lead us to measure with a steady eye
what we expel into the world---
our own effluent.
Is it carbon? Waste? Anger? Resentment?
Impatience? Judgment?
Or love and acceptance,

grace and courage,
patience and calm
persistence and trust?

Thank you for being
the one in whom we trust
the one who showers
all creation with the tools
of resurrection, the promise hope.
May we strive to be engineers of
transformation in ourselves and in the world. Amen.

Pastoral Prayer

July 16, 2023

Susan Cooke Kittredge

Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Dear God,

Clarity is a relief
in vision, windows, decisions
and broth.

Clear as rain they say
and so it is
each drop a crystal prism
reflecting, refracting
playing with light
like a puppy with a ball
turning it rolling it
catching sun
throwing rainbows.

But landing
rain becomes
what it touches
green grass, brook, stream, river, lake and ocean
on occasion even overflowing, drenching
losing clarity, lost in churning
currents and mud.
Sweet drops consumed by a tide of fortune.

Dreams like rain
can disappear or get cloudy when they land
hopes dashed with a downward glance
the shake of a head, a bitter word, rejection or depletion.
A ship of migrants
desperate for sanctuary, tethered to a dream of hope
sinks into the sea, their cries silenced in a collective gurgle of submersion.

Water, water cleansing and condemning.

May we stand in the rain this day
catching drops before they land
that we might channel clarity and love
to your beloved earth and all that dwell therein.

Amen.

Pastoral Prayer
June 18, 2023
Father's Day

Susan Cooke Kittredge
Charlotte Congregational Church

Gracious God,

Some among us have been waiting for summer to start. Waiting because summer can't begin until school ends, graduation is over, until the garden is in, until vacation begins, until it stops raining and warms up.

We think summer will come on our terms. And in the meantime, while we're busy chasing breaks in the clouds, and trying to keep to the clock and all and nothing we have scheduled, the leaves on the maple tree have grown to lily pads. And the lilacs have turned brown and begun thinking about next year as they push seeds with all their might. So, pausing in the yard by the bush, saddened that we never even had a bunch of lilacs on the kitchen table this spring, we pause—finally---and look around.

Dear God, how foolish we are to ignore the beauty of the earth, to let one single day go by without standing in the rain and giving thanks, without taking in the magnificence of these green fields and this lush valley.

And so it is with our devotion to you. We push you aside in the rush to accomplish and in the back of our minds promise to pay attention to you in a bit, when we have a moment. I will start praying daily, just a short prayer, soon, really. We'll start saying grace before meals; it's a good idea, maybe even tonight. I will cook for the Salvation Army sometime this summer and remember to stock the Little Free Pantry. I'll visit a friend who is lonely.

And in the meantime, dear God, you have been laying blessings at our feet so plentiful that we trip over them. Whether we raise our furrowed brows or not, you scatter blossoms on our heads and fill our days with beauty and love. And often we don't notice because it is not on our terms.

And so it is with fathers. Sometimes they just don't fit into our schedules, our expectations, our dreams. They are less or more than we can take, we plan what they should be like and often they don't follow our dictates. But every once in a while, if we are lucky, we stop and see that what they have been doing all along is thinking about the next generation—like the lilac bush—thinking about us. There are times when we do not share the same plan, times when we are disap-

pointed or angry or hurt. But there are also moments when, filled with the grace of God, we see our fathers as a child of yours. Thank you, God, for taking care of our fathers when we cannot, for loving them when they are gone from us. Thank you for the love you express through them, through their love for us. Lead us, in this verdant season, to take love on your terms, not on our schedule. Lead us to pause and pray and stand awhile in the shower of your love.

Amen.

May 21, 2023
Ascension Sunday

Susan Cooke Kittredge
Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

The Breath of Spring

Dear God,

In spring we wonder at the nights
held back in check by all the light--
a playful sun that will not stop
its giddy dance on the mountain top,
or keeping score at the baseball game
or casting light for the gardener's gain.
A sun that brightens the rainbow's arch
and lights the trek of the black ants' march.
So full of itself, this radiant thing
forgets to go to bed in spring.

And yet the nights, though shortened be,
are packed with all eternity
and can it seems without much sleep
make leaves grow full and lilacs weep.
And so we marvel at the break of dawn
as we stumble out and heave a yawn
that the bridal wreath should in one night's time
have burst in bloom and fragrant rhyme.

We stop to fill ourselves with scent
and breathe a breath of holy scent.
Is it the apple blossoms that we smell
or the phlox that creeps upon the hill?
Could it be the daphne?
And quick we are upon our knees
to sniff these petals beneath the trees
that shower us in blossoms' fall,
an errant snowfall over all.
Breathing deep we fill our lungs

with all the sweetness you have flung
to make us pull your Spirit in,
to marvel at the breath of spring.

Your ways, O God, are wondrous fair
and so we ask your loving care
on all who would this day draw breath,
from giving birth to facing death,
may your Spirit fill their little hearts
with all the love you can impart
and raise all souls to glory sing
the wonders of the breath of spring.

Amen.

Pastoral Prayer

May 14, 2023

Mother's Day

Susan Cooke Kittredge

Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Almighty and Gracious God,

In the midst of this redolent spring, of apple blossoms and lilacs, we wonder at our expectations. Each warm day fires us up get it and we hear behind the engine of spring the drone of “should.” We should have planted at least some things in the vegetable garden; we should have cleaned the mudroom, washed the hats and mittens, we should have paid the bills, washed the windows, written the thank you notes, cleaned the house—what, but the way is that tradition of “spring cleaning” and who has time for that? We should have finished the proposal, reached out to our ailing relative, weeded the garden, played with children, finished that project, started this one, mended fences in field and family.

Who tells us this? Why do we berate ourselves for things not done, when all about us your creation calls, “Stop! Look! Listen!” Listen to the birds proclaiming in song the joy of life and procreation. Look at the valley purring with delight in the full flush of its verdant explosion. Stop, lest you miss spring and turn too late to see the petals fallen.

Today we think of our mothers and note that what might be easy, can be complicated. For some this is a day of remembrance, of dwelling in the liminal space of recollection, nostalgia, regret and gratitude. For others it can be a painful day when, for whatever reason, salt is poured in a festering wound. Yet for some this day speaks of possibility, of growth, of flourishing and becoming even in the midst of exhaustion and worry.

Is this what it's like for you, mother of us all? Do you worry and rejoice and laugh and cry? This day we pray for mothers who are longing—longing for their children from whom they have been separated for whatever reason: whether as a result of harsh immigration practices, distance, loss or discord. And for women who long to be mothers but find their dream so far denied. For women who have intentionally chosen not to be mothers themselves, this can be a hard day.

Holy God, as spring blossoms into promise may we too nurture and tend your magnificent creation, from the tiniest insect to the fragile ozone and all that lies within.

Amen.

Pastoral Prayer

May 7, 2023

Susan Cooke Kittredge

Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Dear God,

The hummingbird's wings
beat faster than than the swallow's
but not by much.

The swallow wins on glide and dip
the hummingbird on intention.

Why must we live by comparison?
One child to another
one house, one job,
one body to others,
this mass shooting worse than that
degrees of happiness
or despair weighed against
what was or yet might be.

A King's coronation, weighted down in
gold, diamonds, brass, fur and ceremony
pales in comparison to
the crowning of spring in this valley.

Magnolias, tulips, apple blossoms, asparagus
skunk cabbages cloaked in gold
sparkling with morning dew
bird choirs and budding trees
all herald birth, the well-spring of hope
the gift of creation
your blessing of life.

There is no scale for love for love,
no comparing,
feather light
deep as the oceans
tiny as an ant's hair
and vast as the heavens
from whence we have come
and whither we shall return.

Lord in your mercy,
Hear our prayer. Amen.

Pastoral Prayer

April 23, 2023

Susan Cooke Kittredge

Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Dear God,

We are inclined to resolutions--
New Year's notwithstanding
as it inspires ones rarely kept.

Spring is when we plan
resolutely minutely
sectioning each hour for maximum efficiency
if only to smell air rife with life.

What kept us busy all winter when our world was frozen?
Whatever did we do with ourselves?

Never mind, forget we asked.

In Khartoum
one family sections
one limp cucumber six ways
one day's feast of scarcity.

Last week they too inclined to spring
this week death prowls like a lion
outside the door.

Guilt circles our abundant lives
as we pray for peace elsewhere
buzzing from task to task
like honeybees sucking gardenias
in the garden of Eden.

But if the butterfly effect is true--
that even the smallest action
reverberates afar--
then their pain is truly in us
and our prayers in them.

Isn't this how it works?
We are one people, your people
sharing in this sweet and aching life,
this too short taste of love.

Amen.

Easter Sunday
April 9, 2023

Susan Cooke Kittredge
Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Dear God of Mystery and Love,

Easter invites a surrender to joy.
We protest citing worries real and more imagined:
wars, famines, droughts, floods,
injustice, racism, the climate, the climate
wretched cancer, persistent melancholy,
money's vice grip,
nighttime suspicions
wayward children,
unchecked addictions
an aching back.

Stop! you say. Just stop.
Grant me this morning.

Slowly letting go the mantel of management
children all we search for hidden treasures
eggs or jelly beans
chocolate certainly
singing birds, waking bears,
blushing purple peony shoots
a soft touch of love
a belly laugh,
a rake with all its tines.

An Easter hunt is not as silly as it seems.

Who knows what hope and joy
we may yet discover
in the rising Son
of Easter
if we but grant you this day
and maybe even
our fragile and unfolding life.

Amen.

Out of Line

Holy God,
Shoulder to shoulder, seat to seat,
heads bowed down and feet to feet
we sit and listen, sit and pray
and watch the unfolding of this holy day.

Observers we at this frightening hour
lined up in rows to watch the power
of a people's fear make love grow dim
as we cry with one voice: "Crucify him!"

Standing on the streets of Jerusalem,
standing shoulder to shoulder
feet to feet,
would we have offered an apple to eat?
Would we have reached a hand to wipe
the sweat, the blood, the tears, the fright?
Or turned instead from the sight
and prayed to God, "This isn't right."
And nothing done that wasn't safe
that wasn't meek, that caused a chafe
against the chains we all must wear
when guilt's the burden that we bear.

We line up at the traffic light,
we sit in rows this morning bright,
and in our lines at the grocery store,
cart to cart we wish for more.
But ever do we fill that cart
with food for those with broken hearts?
Step out of line and help the man

who does not see his favorite can,
who cannot reach the topmost shelf
who cannot help his broken self?

Grant us the courage, give us the heart
from expectations to depart
that we may step out of line
and in your love radiant shine--
One person here, another there
offering hope, offering care,
giving help, standing out
asking why, expressing doubt,
reaching with love to those in need,
that Easter morn we may indeed
proclaim with joy and radiant glee
Christ lives today in you and me!

Grant us the courage, give us the heart
from expectations to depart
that we may step out of line
and in your love radiant shine--
One person here, another there
offering hope, offering care,
giving help, standing out
asking why, expressing doubt,
reaching with love to those in need,
that Easter morn we may indeed
proclaim with joy and radiant glee
He lives today in you and me!

Pastoral Prayer
March 19, 2023

Susan Cooke Kittredge
Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Dear God,

The willows are in their glory
weeping golden leafless plums
of spring's foretelling trumpet

by the edge of the road
where darkness bows to light
and winter to spring
pussy willows
fuzz it up
a humming party of vibration.

Northern winters keen
our eyes
to promise and to plunder
our ears
to melody and cacophony.

We choose the cardinal
over banks collapsing,
foxes running fields
over of drones descending
indictments pending
the worry of upending.

Until the forsythia
leads the charge of spring,
we shall bear your promise
choosing hope over anxiety

even in grief's
deep and rolling wake
even though hearts
are broken

we'll clear the path for new life
sweep the front porch
and be ready to soak in the Easter Son.

Amen.

Pastoral Prayer

March 5, 2023

Susan Cooke Kittredge

Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Dear God,

Last week the tracks were everywhere
deer pawing frozen fields for nibbles of green
coyotes straddling ski trails
without paying a toll
wide webbed feet of Canada Geese
padding down melting snow,
bounding weasels and mink
out for a sniff and a stroll.

By the edge of the field where the woods begin
a dead coyote
his tufts of fur strewn across the snow
a deep brown hole in his belly
where hawks and fox have feasted.

Then came this sugar snow
and all have gone to cover.
It's not cold or windy,
harsh or unremitting
it's March and they must surely know
this will soon pass.
Why are they so hunkered down
beneath the pines and roots of home?

Do they know something we do not,
or have they simply had enough of winter?

Mustering the energy to
dig, hunt, travel and sniff out possibility
can just be too much.

Are they sleeping in their dens
saying the rosary, snapping at one another,
listening to their bellies growl?

Lent is a quiet snow storm
on the cusp of spring.
We too will rest in burrows
of liminal time and listen
and wait and venture out
to lay our footprints in the world
with consideration
for the weight we press on the
face of the earth.

Still by the edge of this season
looming in our peripheral vision
one whose body is spent
like the coyote
feeding us
through sacrifice and surrender.

With gratitude and adoration
we watch,
we wait,
we sup at the feast and
tread lightly in
his holy tracks.

Amen.

Pastoral Prayer
February 25, 2023

Susan Cooke Kittredge
Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Dear God,

Creation is the song you have written.
Or maybe it's a tune, a concerto--
yes, that's better, no words--
having melody and harmony,
with themes at times obscured
by instruments that grandstand
their fleeting measures of fame.

Middle sections, movements,
that surprise, confuse or alarm,
obscure the crucial thread,
unravel what we thought we knew
leaving us lost, blind and deaf.

We fall to our knees
splayed hands on the ground
feeling for the familiar hum,
the rumble beneath the ragweed,
the rocks, the grass and invasives,
the diminishment of vigor.

Here it comes again, faintly at first,
a train whistle in the distance--
a child's laugh or is it a cry?--
coming closer, enveloping us,
moving us to sway and tap our feet again.
We know this rhythm
it comes as much from within us
as without.

It is your song of love and assurance.
Even as wars blare in distant lands
and leaders flash swords of annihilation
and fatal gunshots echo in dark streets
and snowy valleys,
still your tune, your love
is the beat we keep,
in spite of it all
because of it all,
now and forever.

Amen.

Pastoral Prayer
February 12, 2023

Susan Cooke Kittredge
Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Dear God,

We cannot hold in mind or heart
the image of so many crushed beneath concrete.
“Rubble” they call it belittling
the heft of stone forged with gravel and water
for maximum weight and power.

Recoiling from the magnitude--
the gray piles of twisted death,
smoke, whitened black gloves digging,
men standing, snow falling,
women weeping--
we squint to find you
through the dust of disaster.

Where are you,
O Mighty, and Ever-Loving,
Beneficent Spirit God?

It's a fair question.

Hearing no answer, hearing nothing,
we turn again to the gruesome reality
and watch the number rise
like ticker tape 27,000, 28.
But this we can manage to hold:
the eye lashes of the dead
closed against the onslaught.
Lashes that have in the fullness of time
rimmed smiling eyes
and held sparkling tears of joy and sorrow.

Lovely lashes, thick and thin,
old and young,
fluttering wings of life's
abundant beauty, winking, weeping,
sleeping.

Caked now in debris
turned suddenly to fairy dust,
kissed by eternity,
wings of love bearing souls
to your radiant light.

And still the lashes of the living
weighted with exhaustion and grief,
dig and tend and heal and mourn.

You are there, where you have
always been;
with all whose hearts are broken
with those who suffer,
and, even with us
praying this morning
with pleading eyes
for mercy.

Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Amen.

Pastoral Prayer
January 29, 2023

Susan Cooke Kittredge
Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Dear God,

January's landscape is a white canvas across our land. Framed by mountains, roads and rivers, it lays before us, waiting. And wait it can like no other month, longer it seems by a week or more. Unwilling to surrender to the skip of February, January holds tenaciously to the slow turning of calendar days, its prideful possession of time and space.

What are we to make of this blank canvas before us? Playing in the snow does not eradicate its open invitation to consideration. Uncluttered by growing green things and the rush of other seasons, it prods the imagination to reflection.

We could, of course, fill it with particulars of superficiality and do, but they don't adhere as well as curiosities of depth, as longings of soul and heart, as commitments of meaning, sorrow shared, love expressed and art given life.

So carefully, this day as a start, we place a pole of remembrance for Tyre Nichols, beaten to death in Memphis. And we take the time to wonder why the officers did that, what it is in their lives that brought them there? What fear, frustration and loneliness drives all who use violence as release? What brokenness is thus so gruesomely and tragically expressed?

Help us, O Holy One, to nurture the children and youth in our families, our church, our community and country that they may grow up feeling supported, loved and cherished. Be with us as we paint on the canvas before us images of hope, love and action. Stir us from our couches of complacency to be forces of change and prophets of peace.

Amen.

Pastoral Prayer
January 8, 2023

Susan Cooke Kittredge
Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Dear God,

Off kilter, out of sorts, confused are we.
Green lawns in January should not be.
Red buds humming atop naked maple trees signal trouble.
The Canada geese are back—or did they know what lay ahead
and never fly south?
Snow geese forage in fields wet and fertile;
But are they coming or going?

Skunks and bears scratch their heads
wandering drunk with sleep from their dens.
Skiers and skaters snarl in frustration.

We are a flock of Rip Van Winkles;
did we sleep through winter?
This past week smelled like April.
Is this weather a prophecy?

It's been a gentle January
unknown in record books.
Leave us not snarl at windfalls
nor be consumed by dismay
but live this sunny day
in its fullness, soaking warmth
against the unknown morrow.

Oddity is a poignant teacher.

“Consider this,” it says.

And so we shall,

holding our privilege close to the breast

as we lament climate disasters,

racial injustice, poverty,

illness and despair.

Grant us courage, O Holy One,

to consider our mostly flowering lives

as red buds atop maple trees in January--

lovely, lively, hopeful

but wounding

to the trees

and the forest of humanity.

Amen.

January 1, 2023
New Year's Day

Susan Cooke Kittredge
Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Gracious God,

We greet the New Year with a little trepidation, as we greet all new things. We don't know it and it doesn't know us. It's easier at the end of a year, when we know what has been, and whether frightful or fun-filled it is familiar at least and not a surprise.

So looking forward, wondering what will be, who we will be, we reach out to you, our guide, our stay, our shield. Though some of us are anxious about what lies ahead, remind us that with you all things are possible, that no pain is so great that you can't ease it, no disappointment so crushing that you can't raise a spark from dead embers, no sorrow so heavy that you can't bear the weight on angels' wings, no war so furious that you can't bring peace.

Gladdened by your eternal promises, we choose to face the morrow with hopeful hearts. Sustain us, we pray, lest we lose sight of your faith in us. Lead us to know your presence in the simple gifts you place before us: green grass in January, hoar frost, stirring music, good friends, laughter, tears, red foxes crossing winter fields, an apology, forgiveness, a gentle stroke on the cheek, a kiss, mountain tops, skiing, basketball and hockey games.

But as we look ahead, we hold in our hearts those who in the past year have gone from this life. Cradle them in the arms of your eternal mercy, we pray. We offer into your care also those for whom the New Year presents hard choices and difficult challenges. May they know your presence in the midst of struggle and your transformative grace in what may appear to be a disaster. Teach us, we pray, the great relief of joy and light hearts that we may choose faith over fear and trust over apprehension.

Amen.

Christmas Day
December 25, 2022

Susan Cooke Kittredge
Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Holy and Amazing God,

Here we are in the heart of Christmas, in the morning of birth, in the light of day, the departing storm and the dawning of hope. This is it the promise fulfilled, the sun come up, the son born, the greatest gift of all.

As this day goes on, let us not forget this present that arrived without fancy wrapping paper, glossy ribbon or in need of batteries. This treasure of a growing person destined to be for us the tour guide on our own journey back to ourselves, to the person you know each of us to be.

Thank you for your faith in us, for giving us your beloved, for trusting us to care for this precious being without and within.

Amen.

Christmas Eve
December 24, 2022

Susan Cooke Kittredge
Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Gracious and Loving God,

What are we to make of this impending birth?
That it will come we're fairly certain.
Born from the womb of safety
to an infinite, expanding universe,
poor, wee thing of a baby boy.
Naked, startled, jerking flailing arms and legs
with fresh throated croaks from lungs just filled
baby Jesus will come to us on the breath of dawn.
And as he grows, this little one, he'll fall
and trip and fall again
until on steady limbs he walks and runs
and laughs and plays
and learns the heartbreak of dismay.

So too our lives have fits and starts,
we fail and fall as well.
Midst storms without
And those within we shiver in the dark.

Are you suggesting, by chance and folly,
that our redemption
lies in our own frailty?
That being tender of skin and soul
is how you grow within us?

This night, trusting you,
we embrace the uneasy notion that
our salvation dwells
in our own growing, changing,
failing, and starting over
in the manger of your arms,
in the warmth of one
selfless action,
in giving it all away
for love
as you have done this day.

Amen.

Pastoral Prayer
December 11, 2022

Susan Cooke Kittredge
Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Advent Visitor

It matters little what is happening inside the house,
whether meals are being cooked, or shows streaming,
someone laughing still or crying more,
we are brought up by the knock on the door.
So placing down the fork, or rising from the couch,
we pause a moment and know uneasiness,
know apprehension, though there should be none,
know we're not looking our best,
know that we've been caught at rest.
And so less than we had hoped we'd be
we go to greet this guest, this stranger in our kingdom.
Advent comes like a stranger, a hollow knock on the door.
We had been making lists and thinking Christmas;
we are a bustle with demands, regrets,
hopes and sorrows,
we have no time for something more.

Into a house beset by mess and preparation,
filled with illness, loss or laughter
comes this stranger who pulls out a chair
and sits right down at the kitchen table.
The gaul of it, we think, but mind our manners.
What can we do for you? we ask,
a tightness in our jaw.
What can we offer you?
Why are you here?
Impatient, we want this over with.

But Advent has come to stay a while,

to sit in the kitchen and simply be.
What do you want from me? we are confused.
What can I do for you? Why are you here?
When will you go?
Perhaps the answer lies in Advent's silence
and in our questions,
in our wondering what is going on
and what might be asked of us.
Holy God, grant us patience with this
uninvited guest.
May we learn hospitality
May we see who you would have us be;
may we hear our questions as invitations.
Help us to be still with this silent one,
quiet in the chaos.

We will draw up a kitchen chair
and sit a while as well.
Maybe the strange peace will fill even us.
Maybe, just maybe, we will be so calm
that when the knock comes again at our door
in the middle of the night
some weeks from now,
we will with full and joyful hearts welcome in
The Prince of Peace.

Amen.

Almighty and Redeeming God,

We come this morning some like lumbering lions after a kill, stuffed and slow, more inclined to languish off the feast---to sleep a day or two---than face the new day bright and eager. Others come relieved Thanksgiving is over because for one reason or another it was lonely, lonely may-be even in the midst of family, lonely because someone or something was missing, lonely just because.

Still others arrive jubilant at the advent of Advent.

Whether fresh from giving thanks with gusto or with a nod, some enter Advent hesitantly. We're reluctant to get on the train to Christmas, reluctant to make lists, to start a tally of all we think we should do. Like dried corn stalks bending in the field, we stand weakly against the winds of change, heads bowed, arms flapping in the gusts of coming storms.

Lead us, O Holy One, to find in the midst of this next month, a place of solace and peace. Lift us from our lassitude to intentional calm, from reluctance to expectation, from a focus on our lives to a focus on you.

We hold in our hearts all who are displaced this season, all who have lost their homes in this land and abroad, especially those in Ukraine who shelter without power, water or heat. We pray for all who have lost their way though they inhabit familiar surroundings. May you find them in shelters, motels, alleyways, deserts, basements, foreign cities, behind locked bathroom doors, looking out the window, walking in the woods, sitting in their cars, staring at their screens. May you fill them for one brief moment with your grace that they may turn and wonder what that was, that flutter of hope, that flash of light, that skip of spirit. Instill in us all as we approach Christmas morning, the gift of wonder, the ability to perceive you in winsome, fleeting and eternal ways. Amen.

Pastoral Prayer
November 20, 2022

Susan Cooke Kittredge
Charlotte Congregational Church

Almighty and Ever Loving God,
We do well to learn from what you lay before us,
to watch the squirrels and chipmunks prepare for cold and dark,
to note the stilled growth of grass and bush
lest fresh shoots be nipped by chill and frost.
So too we store up provisions and protection
against the cold of winter.

But how about the trees that drop their leaves?
Just when the wind grows fierce
and flurries sting and ice bites bark,
they drop protection and stand leafless
with arms outstretched to all that winter might bring on.
Shouldn't it be the other way around?
Wouldn't it have been a better plan
to have them fluff up with green parkas in winter
to keep them warm in bitter weather?

What might we learn from this deciduous dilemma?
Brave trees, for sure.
Or foolish plan
And then we think of our lives and how—unlike the trees—
we rush to shield ourselves from pain and discomfort:
turn up the heat, pile on the down, swallow the pills,
pour a drink, open the fridge,
keep so busy that we never have to think
or cry,
talk so much we needn't listen,
leave so we don't have to stay.

Might we learn a lesson from the trees
and might it be that if we raise our arms to you,
naked flesh of our humility,
bare gnarled fingers,
twisted limbs, cracked branches and all,
that then you will be our protection and our shield?
And chill though we may be--
eyes tearing and trunks creaking in the wind,
we will be free to live as you would have us,
uncluttered, clear and honest,
straight and tall in faith.

Thank you, dear God,
for the lessons of the fall.
Open our eyes and help us walk the path you lay
in fallen leaves and faithful trees.

Amen.

Pastoral Prayer
October 16, 2022

Susan Cooke Kittredge
Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Dear God,

Dear God, what is wrong with us? Why are we inclined to complain, to notice what's amiss, to judge others, and ourselves? Why are we drawn to the discordant note, the casual dismissal, the unintentional rebuff?

We can be impatient with traffic at this time of year, with tourists snapping photos by the roadside, with drivers going 20 in a 45 mile per hour zone. We'll be late, we mutter, as we drum the steering wheel.

Dear God, lift us from our palace of self-regard, and lead us to follow the visitors' example. Help us to stop by the side of the road, by the side of our lives and breathe in the glory of fall so full of time and energy and filled with you.

And yet, and yet. It is our calling to lay before you all that is broken. We cannot hold the searing ember that a fifteen year-old, a youth, found murder his only solution.

With fervent faith we gather together knowing that you hear our laments no matter how profound or petty. With intention we stop by the side of this day and in this hour turn to you, to each other, to marvel at the radiant faces of life around us, glorious and waving, wrinkled and falling, caught like crimson leaves by the winds of delight, uplifted by your love.

Amen.

Pastoral Prayer
October 9, 2022

Susan Cooke Kittredge
Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Dear God,

We come this morning
in the fullness of our bodies
filled with breath and blood,
flowing and swirling,
spun by electricity of heart and brain.
Supreme electric vehicles
transporting our souls and spirits
to these very pews this morning
where we shift into park.

Some of us come to charge our batteries
worn out by the news
by feeling down or ill
by the season's constant full throttle mode
by fall's infatuation with contradiction.

Hold this, fall says, and ponder for a bit:

Just as the leaves reach their peak of majesty
they fall.
Just as the weather cools from the heat of summer
it slides to frost
Just as our children settle down and mature,
they leave home.

So too are we confounded by war.
Should we delight in military victories
while praying for peace?
Or after?
Or before?
As we seek reconciliation,

a bridge blows up.

“This is good,” we are told

“it was a bad bridge.”

A bad bridge?

Are enemy deaths to be applauded?

Help us, O Holy One,

To hold confusion gently

and water its energy and tension

that together, in prayer, song and word

we might hear your tone

and feel it vibrating in our bodies

for you are the generator,

the engine,

the charging station of love

for a world running on fumes.

Amen.

Pastoral Prayer
October 2, 2022

Susan Cooke Kittredge
Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Dear God,

Last week we celebrated a baptism and blessed and gave thanks for water. How quickly a perspective can change. Since then Hurricane Ian has dumped, drenched and drowned so many hopes and homes, leaving destruction, hardship, death, mold and rising rot.

People in parts of this country and the world walk on hard, cracked earth begging for rain with chapped lips while the others wade through swamped streets and broken dreams.

We have dodged this bullet it would seem. We pick apples and note the turning of leaves. But weather can be a frock while still beneath the beauty of our surroundings some among us struggle to keep our heads above water as debt, sickness and sadness threaten.

Gracious God, help us to understand that our consumption of bounty can harm others. Certainly it is right and good to bathe in days of beauty, but our hunger for more bears careful watching. As we give thanks for abundance, help us to remember those who have so little. Whether as a result of hurricanes, of war, of dictatorships, repression, unjust policies, misguided politics or a dramatically changing climate, so much of the world moans in sorrow and longing, as we wipe the butter from our chins. As we do not deserve the extra, so they are not undeserving. Help us, we pray, to find ways to share our harvest of education, money, good fortune and love. Lead us to set a table where all are welcome, to gather about us those whose hearts pine for protection, whose plates rattle empty from lack of food or friends, from lack of love, whose souls are weighed down with grief.

We raise before you this morning everyone in Ian's path. Everyone. As they sicken from lack of clean water, food and power be their shield. Help us all to swim through the muddy waters of apathy and wealth to save those who need us whether they are at home asleep this very moment, sweating on a forgotten island or living through another day of war in Ukraine. Amen.

Pastoral Prayer
September 11, 2022

Susan Cooke Kittredge
Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Dear God,

Small capes of orange and black
flutter through the air
not high or especially fast
they float with intention
towards milkweed—their favorite-
or buddleia, the butterfly bush,
or other flowers
scent and sweet.

Do they know they are flying
all the way to Mexico?

They occupy a position
in the scheme of fall
and in our awareness;
no one wishes a butterfly ill.
Some reverence we have for them,
truth be known.

Aptly called Monarchs.
Ah, now you see.
So in the season of the butterflies
we pause our obsessive self-regard
to honor the passing of another monarch
a Queen no less
who also with well adorned intention
winged her graceful way
through her people,
through history, calamity, war and chaos,
not fast but sure, toward the journey ahead.

Traveling mercies to monarchs all,
whether insect or sovereign,
it doesn't matter to you, does it?
All creatures of our God now sing.

We return to our beginnings,
time and time again
some slowly through wandering trails
of memory and recollection,
some abruptly through tragedy,
some along the natural flow of wane,
we all come home to your embrace
to be renewed and freshened
to become one with light and love
at our beginnings
at our endings
over and again
until time vanishes and glory reigns.

Amen.

Pastoral Prayer

July 31, 2022

Susan Cooke Kittredge

Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Dear God,

Summer's stillness is settling in. Plants were dehydrated and limp before the storm brought relief on Thursday.

The birds, so frenzied until now, tuck their beaks under their wings at 4:30 in the morning to catch a bit more ruffled sleep. Vanished is the frantic business of staking territory and building nests. Gone too their mating calls of desire.

The moon, lying on its back with feet up, alternates between filling and emptying, breathing in and breathing out. And we, languorous in the heat, are forced to slow a bit, sigh, and put our feet up as well.

Like the moon, we are at times a shadow of ourselves, tight and closed, a sliver in the world seeking not friend but retreat, not exuberance but reserve, a profile slipping through our days. At other times we are full to overflowing and spill our joy like giggling stars in the night sky. We thank you, Gracious God, for being with us in sliver times and full, for resting with us when we feel sad and just letting us be who and where we are.

We pray this morning for people across the world who are enduring floods while others are suffering drought and fires and lakes drying up, money drying up, summer joy drying up. We pray for all who suffer shame or illness, sorrow or war or repression, finding themselves in sliver times. We thank you for your presence with them, whether they know it or not. Lead us, O Holy One, to embody your love and gentleness to those whose hearts, souls and bodies are bruised.

Amen.

Pastoral Prayer

July 24, 2022

Susan Cooke Kittredge

Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Dear God,

Who are we to grip at heat,
at sweat that drips unprovoked
down our necks while we sit still and stare?
Or play games on fields of green
or travel in cars even without AC?
Cars we have and houses,
food and security by any global measure of privilege.

Winds from the Sahara Dessert
blew north to Europe;
Mexican and Caribbean air
visit our temperate zones
and dismayed we swelter and wonder.

We are the lucky ones and have always been.
Profligate for almost 100 years.
Is this wave of scorching weather a reckoning of sorts?
How long can we burn earth's resources
and hope to shield ourselves from the heat?

We come to you, O God, with heads bowed, acknowledging
our part in the crisis this planet and her inhabitants face.
We wonder at the faith, wisdom and desperation
of those who've dwelled long in deserts.

Thank you for the small measure of discomfort
this heat wave brings,
for the real and present longing for shade,
for water, for relief.
For knowing that our ultimate entreaty is to you

and yours is to us
for our action,
for preservation,
for generosity,
for love.

Amen.

Pastoral Prayer
June 26th, 2022

Susan Cooke Kittredge
Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Dear God,

Starting a prayer is the hardest part
giving a chapter title to all that will follow
thinking we need to tell you
how the week has been
what happened to whom
and where and when.

You listen with such patience
as we lay it at your feet
and remind ourselves of all we've held
of what is lost and loved and sweet.

If we let go of that--no news or information--
and came to you in humble stance
offering up on velvet pillows
small birds with broken wings,
trusting you to heal and love,
then these would be the things:

*Our clutch of Senior Youth
and chaperones off to serve in Maine;

*the women in this country
who feel disenfranchised
abandoned and discarded;

*The bipartisan gun legislation
passed this week;

*The image of concealed weapons
in pockets at the Farmer's Market

*The perplexing issue of states' rights

*Our constitution

*Our democracy

*The Supreme Court

*Ruth Bader Ginsburg

*The Eastern Ukrainian city
Of Severdonetesk under Russian control

*The Sperah Districk of Afghanistan
Where more than 1,000 people died
in an earthquake.

We are beset and heavy laden
and ask your healing grace upon those who suffer
and those who hold the suffering.

Amen.

Pastoral Prayer
June 19, 2022
Father's Day

Susan Cooke Kittredge
Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Holy Father,

Founding Fathers.
Lofty, authoritarian designations
of faith and country
brooking little rebuttal,
assuming respect,
abolishing abnegation.

Jesus called you Abba, Daddy,
an intimate salutation,
a lap to fall into,
a hand to hold
a spirit of whimsy
and wisdom
to emulate and honor.

Such the parent we all desire,
some had and some did not,
some striving yet to be
some mourn a chance forgot.

Kind Daddy,
Make of the boys among us
humble, gentle souls
who guide with love
and courage, who stand
with conviction
against injustice,

honor the stirrings of their hearts,
the future of your people,
honor your planet pulsing with life,
that carries the weight of
our transgressions
while steadying
the shuffling gait
of grandfathers
walking the dog at dusk.

Amen.

Pastoral Prayer
June 12, 2022
Confirmation Sunday

Susan Cooke Kittredge
Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Dear God,

This is a day of “Yes.”
We have yearned for it
awash in the “Nos”
that flow from us unabated.
“No” to war, “No” to massacres,
to Covid, racism, discrimination,
inflation, gas prices and division.

“Yes.”
“Yes” they will say to baptism
“Yes” to being confirmed.
“Yes,” most of all to you.

We follow
these bright souls and
turn to you, take your hand,
say “Yes” to hope, to life,
to kindness, to gentleness,
to courage in the face of trial,
patience in suffering,
“Yes” to the strength, conviction, fortitude
and love that you shower us with
this day of days
and evermore.

Amen.

Pastoral Prayer

May 29, 2022

Susan Cooke Kittredge

Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Dear God,

Shuffling we come, young and old
heavy laden,
lugging bruised hearts, bent bodies,
blathering platitudes of
 incomprehension
despair and anger.
Shaking our heads, wringing our
 hands.

We are sick of words
no sense can be made
in the midst of a cyclone.

Looking back honoring
those felled and fallen in wars past,
a quiet stillness enters in.
Not freshly gone, but laid to rest.
Rest proudly and unfairly gained,
lives cut short through service.

No rest, surrender,
acceptance in Texas
or this land.
No rest while we have
breath to breathe.

Pick us up from

the couch of our complicity
make of us prophets all
that we might with wallets, votes,
keystrokes and intention
be the hands and feet
of all children whose
lives lie bright before them
and those
with graves
as fresh
as spring.

Amen.

Pastoral Prayer

May 15, 2022

Susan Cooke Kittredge

Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Dear God,

Numbers confound most of us.

What is a light year anyway?

Glorious that we can see a black hole

at the center of our galaxy,

but hearing it's 27,000 light years away

it vanishes in a flash

leaving us pinpricks in the universe.

How do we know these things?

One million people dead from COVID

is easier and harder to hold.

More than 27,000 but far closer than

light years. These two years, our years

living and losing, loving and longing.

Behind every fallen petal of a life

lie millions more who weep,

in the deep loneliness of grief.

As blossoms open

bees buzz, and creation proclaims

the force of life,

the christened world,

we pause in the flush of spring

to sit for a moment to honor

those who have died--

the fallen petals of hope and promise--

and the sorrow

this country holds deep in its

bones.

Where have they gone?

They seem light years away

and closer than our beating hearts.

Amen.

Pastoral Prayer

May 8, 2022

Susan Cooke Kittredge

Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

On Our Knees

Dear God,

One needn't be a mother
just a woman or a girl
to feel the slap, the lash
across the back
that drives us to our knees.
“Down,” it demands,
“fool that you are,
weak, stupid
untrustworthy and lustful.”

The secret is
that down here
we do our best work.
It's been so through the ages
cleaning up the messes,
planting seeds,
searching for lost coins,
we are powerful on our knees.
Today we come praying,
lamenting, protesting,
pleading, hearts wrung
in desperation and anger. →

Holy Mother, source of all
giver of life, sustainer of souls,
help us to face the fear that fuels
the fury
so that consoled by your love
we may rise from our subjugated
state
not with a jerk but with
slow, strong, grounded intention
lifting with us our daughters
granddaughters, nieces, sisters,
aunts, mothers, grandmothers
taking them by the hand,
cradling them in our arms,
promising to stand by them,
work for them,
love them
proclaim their brilliance
as you have done for us.

May your love illumine
a way forward,
for those who would
be mothers and those
who would not,
for all who
are honored to walk
this path in faith and in determination.

You have raised us well.

Amen.

Pastoral Prayer
Easter Sunday
April 17, 2022

Susan Cooke Kittredge
Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Gracious and Holy God,

Morning of all mornings, days of all days, wonders of wonders. We come this morning like a flock of birds returning from a winter elsewhere. We come aflutter with excitement and promise, with song and joy, with urgency and purpose. We delight in the dawn of this day and in the wonderfully preposterous promise it brings, that death cannot claim our souls, that your light will always overcome the darkness.

Had we been awake last night, we would have known this, for strangely, last night was not dark but flooded with moonlight as if to say to those of us beset by worry: "Fear not." We derive some comfort that the full moon shone also on the Ukrainian night. We pray that your light might fill the hearts of those still in the country and the scattered refugees.

"Fear not," you say, "for even in your darkest night, I am there. I have not forsaken you. Even if you sleep and see not the silver moonlight, know that I watch over you." Was that you, O God, singing in the moonlight, sounding for all the world like an owl and then a goose? Calling in the lunar noon to all who tremble, saying, "Just wait; you will see."

And so we rise this morning, looking, seeking, searching for you, looking for some magnificent, gigantic miracle.

But quietly, gently, as soft and echoing as a bird calling in the night, you do not clang a cymbal or shout from the hills; you simply roll the stone away. And where we had thought to find darkness, we find light. The hope we thought we'd lost, filters back to lighten our hearts. And where we had thought to find you, our God, we find a friend, a loved one, a stranger, a child stroking our hand and we know your love made real in one another. For where we had thought to be exalted, we shall be humbled and where we had thought to be alone, we shall be with all creation.

Thank you, God, for the gift of your son, Jesus, for saving him and us now and forever more.
Amen.

Pastoral Prayer

April 3, 2022

Susan Cooke Kittredge

Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Dear God,

In more ways than the weather, March came in like a lion and went out like a lion. Bitter cold and biting winds held their grip on us just as the Russian offensive pressed cold metal against the people of Ukraine, day after day, night after night. The brutal winds of war lay siege to a people who'd been looking towards spring.

We are weary, Holy One, of worry and find ourselves reaching for hope and signs of new life while instantly feeling guilty, concerned that to do so is selfish and lets the side down.

But whose side are we on anyway? No one wins when bodies from any army lie abandoned in streets and fields.

Is it okay that in our privileged lives we rejoice in longer days and sun that has some kick in it? That we sip sweet nectar from maple trees whose trunks are a quiver with rushing sap and expanse? That we gather for Muddy Gras and laugh in the middle of Lent? That for precious moments we partake of your promises in bread and cup?

Sustain us in our discomfort and lead us this season of trial not away from quandary but to find you on the cross of contradiction, in conflict, strife awe and hope, suffused forever in all creation, the risen, eternal Christ. Amen.

Pastoral Prayer
March 20, 2022

Susan Cooke Kittredge
Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Dear God,

Forgive us, we've forgotten that it's Lent,
a sacred season of wandering, reflection, prayer and silence.
Instead, we've been living in a season of war,
of updates and projections, of wringing fingers,
crushing pictures, destruction and despair.

Lent holds in its lap all of this: warring factions, soldiers, officials,
women, children, confusion, trepidation, pacing, anxiety and prayers.
Jesus himself was sent from home into the wilderness.
The Lap of Lent was made for this, for conflict and questioning
and deep appraisals of the heart.

Honestly, it's too much for us to bear.
So we come to you in this wilderness, this storm
and stop just shy of accusation.
Sustain the people of Ukraine, we pray.
Protect them, save them, lead them to peace
wherever they may find it.
Strengthen and unite the rising global call for care and mercy.

Fortify us that we might pray without ceasing
and our prayers find legs and wings to reach minds
in need of change, souls in need of courage,
hearts in need of love, all in need of you.

Nudge us to marvel at the birds returning,
lead us to the comfort of an awakening land,
a birthing of spring,
the hope of new life. Amen.

Pastoral Prayer

March 6, 2022

Susan Cooke Kittredge

Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Gracious God,

We wash the fruit before we eat it;
fresh, imported, transported,
neither canned nor frozen
blueberries from afar.

Picked, plucked
and trucked
these dark eyeballs on the world
have ridden it seems
on the fuel of war
in this land and beyond.

One berry, one car,
one house, plane
tanker or train
powered by
fossils mined.

Dependent they call us
and so we are.

But speaking of dependency,
in humility and thanks
our deepest
dependency is on you, O God.

To you we turn in this time of war
to pray for peace in Ukraine,
and salvation for her people.

Empower us to pray without ceasing,
to give with flagrant generosity,
and grant us the courage to examine
our complicity in the raw confluence
of a climate heating
and bombs exploding.

And still, in your mercy,
we rejoice in the
coming spring,
the returning birds,
the flowing sap
the sweet acidic burst
of blueberries in mouths
of privilege, power and unrivaled possibility. Amen.

Pastoral Prayer
February 26, 2022

Susan Cooke Kittredge
Charlotte Congregational Church, UCC

Dear God,

Help.

For us, warm in our houses, food in our cupboards,
with plans for this afternoon, this week,
it is a time of worry.

Worry rooted in our monkey brains,
in our churning guts and
restless limbs.

Whoever thought worry could be a luxury?

Fear is worry come to fruition.

The maybe turned to reality,
the threat to attack.

Fear like a virus, like COVID has overtaken Ukraine
threatening to spread to neighboring countries.

Someone is dying right now in Kyiv.

Help us, O Holy One,

To be as quiet as we can.

Help us to be still, soft, slow, steady and sure,
that we might without ceasing send prayers
of love and peace into the troposphere,
that layer of the atmosphere that surrounds
and unites this planet we all call home.

With intention, faith and urgency
we pray for the people of Ukraine,
those who have fled in desperation,
women and children fleeing, weeping
and reaching back for their men left behind

who, bewildered by the weapon thrust in their hands,
stare at the cold fact of war.

Someone is being born right now in Kyiv.

We pray that leaders across the world
Deem the ravages of war too steep
and find a way to stop the violence,
to end this war, to save your people,
to proclaim the power of peace.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer. Amen.