



## *Dear friends:*

*This Sunday marks my 4<sup>th</sup> anniversary serving with you here at First Church! It was a fitting way to start – kicking off our time together with a parade. Well, two parades, really. On one side of the Sanctuary was Pilate’s military parade, reenacting how he would enter the gates of Jerusalem for Passover, riding his most impressive stallion, surrounded by soldiers. On the other side of the Sanctuary was Jesus’ parade, led by the children, riding and following our trusty wheeled donkey.*

*That Thursday, we gathered in the Chapel for dinner, the tables arranged roughly in the shape of the cross. And then we watched as, with each scripture reading, the disciples left the head table one by one. When all that was left was the Christ light, and then darkness fell, we sat in silence, contemplating together the heavy reality of suffering in our world. Our first Easter together was sweeter than we could have known – as the very next year I would film, by myself, in the Memorial Garden, and you would decorate your sidewalk with chalk messages of hope.*

*Our four years together has been, in many ways, a larger version of that first week. We have experienced joy – children and palms waving, and the darkness of profound, incomprehensible, world-shattering isolation. And we emerged together, slowly, from the caverns of our living rooms to the light and rhythms of life – transformed in ways we do not yet understand. In the meantime, we have used our time together to learn, studying relationships, discernment, the disciples, and the interactions between faith and civic life. We have questioned, studying White privilege, racism & Indigenous history. We have joined working groups around public safety and affordable housing. We have made music together, we have mourned together, and we have certainly laughed together. But all of this is bound by one word – together. In a time of extreme alienation, we have found ways to enrich and deepen our ties with one another. You have been, in a word, resilient.*

*If this is something you appreciate, I would encourage you to make a gift to our Easter Offering – which goes to support this work of First Church, from which a tithe of 10% will go to the VT UCC Conference’s “Hope Fund”. This fund provides grants for other congregations to experience the joy we have felt, enabling to enact similar types of new, creative ministries. Both of these offerings make space for the very thing we remember together over holy week – the understanding that, if we give ourselves to the life and message of Jesus, we are able to create space for new life, and for community, even in the darkest of times.*

*To fully experience this new life in our individual lives, however, you do have to allow ourselves to really enter into the fullness of the Passion narratives – which feel uncommonly reminiscent of the day’s news. So I do hope you will join us for all of it – from the Palms (with two parades!) to the Maundy Thursday service (with our first dinner since 2019!), to the hourly vigil (here or in your home) and Good Friday prayer.*

*And then, on Sunday, you can light the included Christ candle, as we rise in celebration of the new life ahead, the shape of which we are just beginning to discern.*

*In faith,*

*Elisa*

