

Trinity Reformed Church of Northwest Connecticut

Biblical, Traditional, Congregational

Lord's Day Worship for
March 16, 2025

"And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect." – Romans 12:2



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“*” = Please stand if you are able.

Welcome, Greeting & Announcements

Call to Worship – Joshua 24:15b-22

Leader: (Joshua said) but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.

People: The people answered and said,

*Leader: Far be it from us that we should forsake the LORD to serve other gods;
for the LORD our God is He who brought us and our fathers up*

People: Out of the land of Egypt,

*Leader: From the house of bondage, and who did these great signs in our sight
and preserved us through all the way in which we went and among
all the peoples*

People: Through whose midst we passed.

*Leader: The LORD drove out from before us all the peoples, even the Amorites
who lived in the land.*

People: We also will serve the LORD, for He is our God.

*Leader: Then Joshua said to the people, You will not be able to serve the LORD,
for He is a holy God. He is a jealous God;*

People: He will not forgive your transgression or your sins.

*Leader: If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, then He will turn
and do you harm and consume you*

People: After He has done good to you.

Leader: The people said to Joshua,

People: No, but we will serve the LORD.

*Leader: Joshua said to the people, You are witnesses against yourselves
that you have chosen for yourselves the LORD, to serve Him.*

People: And they said, We are witnesses.

Prayer of Invocation and Confession

Gospel Absolution Texts – 1Peter 2:9-10

***Hymn #347** (red hymnal) – “The Church’s One Foundation”

Scripture Reading – Deuteronomy 8:1-20

Ancient Creedal Proclamation – Apostles Creed (pg#845 in the red hymnal)

Offerings Presented

[Please put your tithe/offering in the plates before or after the service – Thank you!]
[Gifts labeled “Deacon’s Fund go to aid those in need in the congregation.]

*Doxology #731 (red hymnal)

*Praise God from whom all blessings flow; Praise Him, all creatures here below;
Praise Him above, ye heavenly host: Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.*

*Prayer of Dedication

*Sung Psalm #56B – “You Have Recorded All My Ways”

Prayers of the Church & Lord’s Prayer (sins)

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

Reformation Creedal Reading – Preface to the Cambridge Platform – the great statement of Congregationalist government created by the New England churches in Cambridge, MA in 1649.

The setting forth of the Public Confession of the Faith of Churches (*in colonial New England*) hath a double end, and both tending to public edification:

First, the maintenance of the Faith entire within it self:

Secondly, the holding forth of Unity and Harmony, both amongst, and out with other Churches (not in New England).

Our Churches here (*in New England*), as (by the grace of Christ) we believe and profess the same Doctrine of the truth of the Gospel, which generally is received in all the Reformed Churches of Christ in Europe: so especially, we desire not to vary from the doctrine of Faith, and truth held forth by the Churches of our native country (England).

For though it be not one native country that can breed us all of one mind; nor ought we for to have the glorious faith of our Lord Jesus with respect of persons: yet as Paul who was himself a Jew, professed to hold forth the doctrine of Justification by Faith, and of the Resurrection of the Dead, according as he knew his godly Countrymen did, who were Jews by nature (Gal 2:15; Acts 26:6-7), so we, who are by nature Englishmen, do desire to hold forth the same doctrine of Religion (especially in Fundamentals) which we see and know to be held by the Churches of England (the national Presbyterian church during the Commonwealth), according to the truth of the Gospel.

Ministry of the Word

Prayer of Illumination

*Sermon Text – Deuteronomy 4:7-9

*Gloria Patri #735 (red hymnal)

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost; As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen. Amen.

Sermon – “Keep Your Soul Diligently”

(A Sermon Series on Denominational Heritage & Direction)

*Hymn #353 (red hymnal) – “I Love Thy Kingdom, Lord”

*Benediction

All are welcome for Fellowship & Food downstairs after Worship

Announcements

- **New Members Classes** will start soon. If you are interested in joining the church, or have questions, please contact Pastor Doug.
- As of now, **Wednesday Study** will begin at the standard time of **6:30 PM**.
Gen Alpha Club meets on the 2nd & 4th Wednesday.

Upcoming Events

- There will be a **Ladies Bingo & Pot-Luck Supper Night** on Friday, March 28th at 6:00 PM (with a snow date of Friday, April 4th) at the Gabelmanns' pool-house. All adult ladies are welcome!
- Easter is on April 20th.

Regular Weekly Events

<i>Sunday</i>	9:00 – c.10:00 AM	Sunday School Children's curriculum: KVB Publications Women's Study: Baucham's <u>Expository Apologetics</u> Adult Study: Westminster Larger Catechism
	10:30 – c.11:40 AM c.11:40 AM	Worship (Lord's Supper on the 1 st Sunday of the month) Coffee Hour Fellowship
<i>Tuesday</i>	10:30 AM – Noon	Tuesday Study (Evangelism in Acts) at Pastor Doug's house
<i>Wednesday</i>	6:30 – 8:00 PM	Wednesday Study (on Exodus) at Pastor Doug's house
<i>Friday</i>	6:30 - ??? PM	Young Adult Discussion Group at Pastor Doug's house (1 st & 3 rd Fridays)
<i>Saturday</i>	morning	Prayer Group at the Gabelmann's. (Please call Sheryl to confirm if the group is meeting that day, 860-309-7250.)

ONLINE RESOURCES

TRC's Webpage:	TrinityReformedCT.org
TRC's Facebook Page:	facebook.com/people/Trinity-Reformed-Church/61554974150922/
TRC's Youtube Channel:	youtube.com/@TrinityReformedCT
Pastor Doug's	youtube.com/simplyreformed
Youtube Channels:	youtube.com/@PilgrimsOfPlunder

INTERNET PRAYER CHAIN

If you have any prayer requests for our prayer chain, please email them to Donna Ensminger at: trcnwprayer@gmail.com. (If you would like to join the Prayer Chain, also see Donna.)

LEADERSHIP

Elders:	Rev. Douglas Aldrich, pastor	860-379-1147	douglas_aldrich@sbcglobal.net
	Bob Ensminger	860-485-8738	robert.ensminger@arthurgrossell.com
	Rich Gabelmann	860-605-7852	rgabelmann0415@gmail.com
	Rev. Jonathan Haulenbeek	203-709-0784	jhaulenbeek@icloud.com
Deacons:	David Mattson (chair), Carl Bierce, Caleb Goodell, Mason Goodell, Dean Winters		
Sunday School:	Verna Aldrich, Mason Goodell	Music Coordinator:	Cindy Rines
Clerk:	Sheryl Gabelmann	Treasurer:	Cindy Rines

Trinity Reformed Church of Northwest Connecticut
Worship Starts At: 10:30 AM (9:30 AM in the summer)
Sunday Worship At: Winchester Grange (100 Newfield Rd; Winchester Center, CT 06098)
Mailing Address: P.O. Box 343; Riverton, CT 06065 - Phone: (860) 238-7399
Webpage: trinityreformedct.org - Email: trinityreformedct@gmail.com

Sermon Notes

Deuteronomy 4:7-9

"Keep Your Soul Diligently"

A Mini-Sermon Series on Denominational Heritage & Direction

March 16, 2025

Introduction

- 1) One of the easiest things to do in life is backslide: To start off strong and then slowly get distracted and then maybe end up in some dark place that would seem unimaginable only a few years before. Most of us probably see this all around us.
- 2) There are many famous quotes about this problem:
 - a) *"The road to hell is paved with good intentions."* (Bernard of Clairvaux?)
 - b) Or as C.S. Lewis pointed out, the road to hell is frequently a gradual one with a gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts.
- 3) This can happen because the world creeps in with its desires.
 - a) My advisor at seminary's favorite phrase about church history was: *"Nothing fails like success."*
 - i) Success is a blessing from God but it is never the goal.
 - ii) Faithfulness is the goal.
 - b) As Solomon warns, *"The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways: and a good man shall be satisfied from himself. The simple believeth every word: but the prudent man looketh well to his going. A wise man feareth, and departeth from evil: but the fool rageth, and is confident."* Proverbs 14:14-16
 - c) I heard an axiom about politics, that applies to the church, that unless one is willfully and vigilantly strives to stay conservative, then one will become liberal.
 - i) History, especially in the church, proves this.
 - ii) Throughout biblical and church history there has been a long and sorted history of the church backsliding. (Just think of Congregationalism.)
 - iii) It is the doom of men that they forget.
- 4) One of the key ways for a church to protect herself is to have godly elders who govern the local church, with a special focus on worship, doctrine and teaching in order to remain faithful. Acts 20:17ff
3Tim 3:1ff
1Pet 5:1ff
- 5) The elders have three big policy issues they are looking into this year:
 - a) Outreach, missions and evangelism at TRC.
(Currently discussing this.)
 - b) Lord's Supper Policy, including considering going to weekly communion.
(Next on the list to be discussed – Pastor Doug needs access to his library which will soon be out of the basement)

- c) Whether we should join a Presbyterian denomination to remain faithful to the historic Reformed Congregational faith.
- 6) That last one (Presbyterianism) I would like to preach on now during a mini-sermon series.
 - a) Not to create a policy, that will be up to the elders.
 - b) But to begin to lay the foundation by defining terms, and explaining the history, so that we can think biblically and critically about this rather complex issue.
 - c) This gets at our very identity, so this is an important issue for everyone. Especially for Congregationalists!
- 7) But first, to Scripture.

Deuteronomy 4:7-9

- 1) Deuteronomy is the last book of the Torah, literally "the Law", one the Five Books of Moses, that begin the Old Testament.
 - a) In a lot of ways, Deuteronomy is a recap of Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers. Deut 17:18
 - b) It is a series of speeches and addresses by Moses to the people of God, starting with a historical review in Deuteronomy 1:6-4:40.
 - c) In chapter 4 Moses exhorts Israel to be, and remain, faithful.
 - d) In our sermon text today Moses reminds the OT church about the Covenant made at Sinai/Horeb, where the Ten Commandments were given. Ex 19-20
Ex 19:18
- 2) I want to read "us" (i.e. the NT Church, Protestantism, the Reformed Tradition, Congregationalism and TRC) into this text.
 - a) *"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness"* - 2Tim 3:16
 - b) Note, that Moses' address is not to the leadership but to all the people. Deut 4:1
- 3) First, we are reminded, we have been greatly blessed!
 - a) Deuteronomy 4:7 - *"For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as is the LORD our God whenever we call on Him?"*
 - i) There is only one "nation" that has God near to it.
 - In the OT it was the nation-state of Israel, which was a figure and shadow of the reality of the NT Church. Col 2:16-17
Heb 8:5; 10:1
 - For the NT Church is *"a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession"* - 1Pet 2:9
 - ii) The Church alone has been purchased with Christ's blood. Sealed and indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Acts 20:28
Eph 1:13; 4:30
 - iii) We are near to God because He has drawn us to Himself. John 6:44
 - iv) Since we, by Christ's blood, are now His children, He listens to us and cares for us. Eph 1:5ff
1Pet 5:7
 - v) Our prayers are special, and powerful, as we just read in Revelation. Rev 5:8; 8:3-4
 - b) Deuteronomy 4:8 - *"Or what great nation is there that has statutes and judgments as righteous as this whole law which I am setting before you today?"*

- i) We have the complete, full written word of God, the Holy Scriptures!
 - We have the blessing of the Old Testament and the Law, which is what Moses is speaking about.
 - And we have the clarity of the New Testament that tells us of the new Covenant of grace!
 - ii) Though Scripture is our final authority, we have 2,000 years of guidance of the Holy Spirit, instructing the church.
 - We have the great ancient & Reformation Creeds.
 - We stand on the shoulders of generations of godly faithful men.
- 4) There are commands and a warning too:
- a) Deuteronomy 4:9 - *"Only give heed to yourself and keep your soul diligently, so that you do not forget the things which your eyes have seen and they do not depart from your heart all the days of your life; but make them known to your sons and your grandsons."*
 - b) We are to "give heed", meaning to keep on watch, to intentionally enter a state of awareness and caution in order to protect.
 - i) We are to keep our "soul diligently" and not forget the things God has done and taught us.
 - ii) We are not only to keep them all the days of our lives but we are to make sure that they are known to our sons and grandsons.
 - c) In a culture that worships individualism, pragmatism and wants everything to be immediate, this is very hard.
 - d) So, how do we protect this church for the next several generations?

Foundations

- 1) I am assuming we are committed to having a biblical, conservative, traditional church.
 - a) And we believe the theology and practice of the Reformed Tradition in general, and the great creeds of our Congregational heritage in particular, are the best articulation of true biblical theology.
 - b) Of course, other Christians disagree (e.g. Lutherans, Anglicans, Baptists, etc.) and that is fine, they have freedom to disagree, and have their own traditions, and we wish them well as brothers and sisters in Christ. Mark 9:38-40
 - c) For this church, however, we desire to be historic Congregationalists, which is from the Reformed Tradition.
 - i) We believe in the great creeds of historic Congregationalism, namely:
 - **Savoy Declaration of Faith** (1658 AD) - A modified version of the Presbyterian Westminster Confession.
 - **Cambridge Platform** (1648 AD) - The great statement of congregational government.
 - **Westminster Shorter & Larger Catechism** (1647 AD) - Which are foundational documents of the Presbyterians too.
 - ii) And we believe in congregational government - That the final say, in all matters, is with the voting membership of the local church and that the local congregation owns the church property.

- 2) Though the final responsibility is with this local congregation, and her voting members, we cannot do this alone.
 - a) Where do we get our pastors from? Our educational material? Advice and counsel? Fellowship?
 - b) We believe the local church has some autonomy, however, we are not suppose to be by ourselves, a lone island.
 - c) Radical autonomy is contrary to the Bible, Reformed Theology and historic Congregationalism.
- 3) ***The main point to ponder: Is the best way to preserve Reformed Congregational doctrine and practices for us to go on some level Presbyterian?***

Responding to Initial Questions

- 1) Numerous questions should come to mind!
 - a) Let me try to answer, the most obvious ones, directly and succinctly today.
 - b) More in-depth answers will require other sermons, thus this mini-series.
- 2) *Question:* Are you not committed to Congregationalism?
 - a) *Answer:* I am 100% committed both to the traditions of Congregationalism and congregational government.
 - b) Any denomination we might join has to believe that the final say is with the local congregation and the local congregation controls its property.
- 3) *Question:* What do you mean by "go Presbyterian"?
 - a) *Answer:* That can be of various levels, ranging from:
 - i) The church officially joins a Presbyterian denomination.
 - ii) Pastor Doug seeks ordination status with a Presbyterian denomination.
 - iii) Having fellowship with Presbyterian churches, organizations, and/or gathering though not joining them directly.
 - iv) Simply use Presbyterian material.
 - v) And/or a combination of some, or all, of the above.
 - b) By the way, that process has already begun.
 - i) Our hymnal, psalter, Sunday School curriculums, the free material we give out, organizations I suggest people fellowship with (e.g. RUF - Reformed University Fellowship), churches I recommend people to visit on vacation, and any missionary organization we might look into, are all Presbyterian.
 - ii) *Question for you:* If the church had to replace the pastor, where would we go to find the new one?
 - Assuming we want to continue the direction we are going, I have told the elders they should contact Presbyterian denominations and ask for resumes of candidates to be hired "out of bounds."
 - "Out of bounds" is when a Presbyterian denomination allows one of its ministers to serve in a non-Presbyterian church. The pastor stays under the authority of the Presbyterian denomination while serving the church which remains independent.
 - iii) Imagine, if the next pastor of TRC is Presbyterian and it goes well, and the next one after him is Presbyterian, what do you think will happen to TRC?

3) *Question:* Why go Presbyterian? Why not stay Congregational?

- a) *Answer:* A working assumption on my part from much research is: At best, Congregationalism is almost dead. At worst it is already dead.
 - i) By "Congregationalism" I mean the biblical, historical, creedal version of Congregationalism as testified to by the Savoy and Cambridge.
 - ii) I do not mean the liberal UCC or NACCC versions of Congregationalism, or even the generic Evangelicalism of the CCCC.
(Those are Congregational denominations.)
- b) Might ask: Why all the Presbyterian stuff (hymnals, curriculum, etc.)?
 - i) Because there are no Congregational equivalents.
 - ii) There are Presbyterian denominations, seminaries, publishing-houses, university fellowships, missionary organizations, support groups, etc. in the USA.
 - iii) There are no, "zero", equivalent organizations for traditional conservative creedal Congregationalism.
- c) The number of churches that I know of which are officially committed to creedal Congregationalism in Connecticut? Answer: One.
 - i) Connecticut, historically, is the second great region for Congregationalism on the planet. (Massachusetts is first.)
 - ii) I know of at least a dozen conservative Presbyterian churches in Connecticut. And Presbyterianism is not historically native to New England.
- d) Congregationalism went liberal faster and earlier than any other denomination.
 - i) It's fall really began in the mid-18th century and greatly accelerated in the 19th century.
 - ii) Its collapse was so complete that most, including the vast majority of modern Congregational pastors, define Congregationalism as the same thing as theological liberalism.
 - iii) Part of Presbyterianism was able to remain faithful throughout American history.
- e) Historically, Congregationalism and Presbyterianism are kissing cousins.
 - i) They were created together in 17th century with much mutual contact and fellowship between the two.
 - ii) Doctrinally, they share many of the same confessional statements, only disagreeing about the nature of church government.
 - iii) Several times in history the two have joined together.
- f) Finally, I think, much of modern conservative Presbyterianism is actually Congregational.
 - i) Many of the modern conservative Presbyterian denominations were created in the 20th century when the liberals took over the infrastructure.
(Liberals always want earthly power.)
 - When the conservative Presbyterians founded their new denominations, to remain faithful to the old ways, many included more congregational elements.
 - Thus, making them functionally Congregationalists, in the old sense.

- ii) The original, Bible believing, creedal congregational system of government looks almost Presbyterian to moderns.
 - Yes, the final say was with the members of a local church.
 - However, they had elders, as the Bible commands.
 - And they had regional meetings (called Synods) that dealt with regional and inter-church issues and had close fellowship with sister churches.
- 4) *Questions:* Do you think TRC has to join a denomination? And/or a Presbyterian denomination? Do you want to join one soon?
- a) *Answer:* No, to all those questions.
 - b) Rushing to join a denomination would be foolish.
 - c) I'm okay if we don't join a denomination and there might be good reasons not to.
 - d) I do think we will, and currently, have increasing ties to Presbyterianism in order to remain Congregational.
 - e) Thus, we should heed the words of the Law and do things with all diligence, prayer, study and reflection.
 - f) I do think we should have an intelligent conversation about what level we should be active in, instead of just stumbling forward in an uninformed way.
- 5) *Question:* What Presbyterian denomination would you recommend?
- a) *Answer:* I don't know.
 - b) There are several, and they all have their strengths and weaknesses.
 - c) To give two examples:
 - i) The PCA is the largest and best established but there are concerns it might be drifting into theological liberalism.
 - ii) Vanguard is new but very small.
- 6) *Questions:* Why join a denomination and where is this in the Bible?
- a) *Answer:* That is a good question!
 - b) There are many practical benefits, however, I do believe the Bible commands us to be in close fellowship with like-minded churches. I plan to preach a whole sermon on this.
 - c) You might want to start reading 2Corinthians.

Conclusion

- 1) Let me put this simplistically, giving my assumptions:
 - a) We (TRC) are responsible to remain faithful and this requires work and vigilance.
 - b) We believe the best way to do this is to be grounded in Scripture.
 - c) We believe the Reformed Tradition of our Congregational fore-fathers is the best expression of biblical historical Christianity.
 - d) We cannot do this (completely) alone.
 - e) It seems, Congregationalism is dead.
 - f) Presbyterianism, is by the far the closest thing to Congregationalism, and still has some health to it.

- g) It seems, some of Presbyterianism is now functionally Congregational.
 - i) Therefore . . . ???
- 2) So, maybe we should begin to look into Presbyterianism, on some level?
Especially, since we are already doing it.
- 3) I need to do a few more sermons to explain some of these points in more detail, including:
- a) A more careful definition of Congregationalism and Presbyterianism by looking at their history.
 - i) Those terms have changed meaning over history, in some cases radically.
 - ii) Maybe a sermon on what is Reformed would help?
(Tell me if you want to hear an introductory sermon on this.)
 - iii) And/or a sermon on why did Congregationalism go so wrong?
And why did some of Presbyterianism remain faithful?
 - b) Where is denominationalism in the Bible?
 - c) Maybe a sermon on the different Presbyterian denominations in the USA.
(Not that exciting but might be necessary.)
- 4) If you have questions or concerns by all means, contact me, I would love to chat!
- a) If there are particular topics you want clarified for a future sermon, please do ask!
 - b) 2Peter 3:17-18 – *“You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness, but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.”*