

Trinity Reformed Church of Northwest Connecticut

Biblical, Traditional, Congregational

Lord's Day Worship for
March 23, 2025

*"Teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo,
I am with you always, even to the end of the age." – Matthew 28:20*



trinityreformedct.org

“*” = Please stand if you are able.

Welcome, Greeting & Announcements

Call to Worship – 1Timothy 3:15b-16

Leader: I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself

People: In the household of God,

Leader: Which is the church of the living God,

People: The pillar and support of the truth.

Leader: By common confession,

People: Great is the mystery of godliness:

Leader: He who was revealed in the flesh,

People: Was vindicated in the Spirit,

Leader: Seen by angels,

People: Proclaimed among the nations,

Leader: Believed on in the world,

People: Taken up in glory.

Prayer of Invocation and Confession

Gospel Absolution Text – Psalm 85:1-2

***Hymn #92** (red hymnal) – “A Mighty Fortress”

Scripture Reading – 2Kings 22:8-23:8

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 #53A** – “The Fool Says in His Heart”

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 – An Apologetical Narration, 1644 AD.

(A statement by the 5 Congregational pastors from the Westminster Assembly to the English parliament calling for a more moderate form of church government.)

When it pleased God to bring us his poor Exiles back again in these revolutions of the times, as also of the condition of this kingdom, into our own land, (the pouring forth of manifold prayers and tears for the prosperity whereof, had been no small part of that public worship we offered up to God in a strange land;) we found the judgment of many of our godly learned brethren in the Ministry (that desired a general reformation) to differ from ours in some things wherein, we do professedly judge the Calvinian Reformed Churches of the first reformation from out of Popery, to stand in need of a further reformation themselves;

Although upon the very first declaring our judgements in the chief and fundamental point of all Church discipline, and likewise since, it hath been acknowledged that we differ much from them. And we did then, and do here publicly profess, we believe the truth to lie and consist in a middle way betwixt that which is falsely charged on us, Brownism (i.e. radical separatists); and that which is the contention of these times, the authoritative Presbyterial Government (i.e. denies local authority) in all the subordinations and proceedings of it.

Ministry of the Word

Prayer of Illumination

***Sermon Text** – Acts 15:4

*“When they (Paul & Barnabas) arrived at Jerusalem, they were received by the **congregation** (ekklēsia, the church, the assembly) and the apostles and the **presbyters** (presbyteroi, elders), and they reported all that God had done with them.”*

***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 – “Congregationalism & Presbyterianism, part 1 - Origins”

(A Mini-Sermon Series on Denominational Heritage & Direction)

***Hymn #570** (red hymnal) – “Faith of Our Fathers!”

***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.
- TRC is putting together a simple **Photo-Directory** for members and friends of the church.
 - It will include the following information: First & Last Name, Address, Phone Number, Email Address. (Children will be listed individually next to parents.)
 - If you don't want to be in the book, or to have some of your information not listed, then please email: trc.photobook@gmail.com
 - We would like include pictures. You can email in a picture you like or you can have your picture taken on a Sunday by Bryan & Kim Simmons.
To email in a picture, please send it to: trc.photobook@gmail.com
To schedule a Sunday to have a picture taken, email: kimsimmons7@optonline.net
 - We hope to have all the information in by Easter (April 20th).
 - There will be a review copy to check before we publish the Directory.

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

Acts 15:4

“Congregationalism & Presbyterianism, part 1 - Origins”
A Mini-Sermon Series on Denominational Heritage & Direction
March 23, 2025

Introduction

- 1) The ending of the preface to the Cambridge Platform of 1648 AD, the great Congregational statement of church government, reads:

*"And if the Congregational way be a way of truth (as we believe) and if the Brethren that walk in it be zealous of the truth, and hate every false way (as by the rule of their holy discipline they are instructed, 2John 10,11) then verily, there is no branch in the National Covenant (i.e. the state English Church), that engageth the covenanters to abhor either Congregational Churches, or their way: which being duly administered, do no less effectually extirpate (destroy, root out) the Antichristian Hierarchy, and all blasphemies, Heresies, and pernicious errors (i.e. medieval Roman Catholicism), than other way of discipline doth, which is more generally and publicly received and ratified. But the Lord Jesus commune with all our hearts in secret: and he who is the King of his Church, let him be pleased to exercise His Kingly power in our spirits, that so His Kingdom may come into our churches in purity and peace Amen, Amen."*¹

- 2) In 2025 we read on the front page of the United Church of Christ's webpage, the largest Congregational denomination, and the direct chronological successors of the Cambridge Congregationalists ,the following:

*"This Womxn's (that's not a typo) History Month, Christians Unite for Reproductive Rights: We know that when people have full bodily autonomy and reproductive freedom their families and communities thrive. Our country must safeguard access to abortion and the full range of reproductive healthcare. Urge your members of Congress to re-introduce and pass the Women's Health Protection Act today!"*²

- 3) So, in 377 years, Congregationalism we went from a glorious statement of Christ's Kingdom by very godly, courageous and learned men, to an insane call to murder children by demon worshipping, godless, anti-Christ, cultural Communists.
- 4) What happened?!
- 5) We are doing a mini-sermon series looking at the history of Congregationalism (our heritage), and its closest cousin (Presbyterianism).
 - a) This is to help us (the elders – called presbyters in the Greek NT and the congregation) to make wise decisions about safe guarding this church and faithfully leading it into the future, if God is so gracious.
 - b) We believe the best expression of biblical Christianity is the Reformed Theology of the early Puritans.
 - c) However, what do we do if Congregationalism is dead?
 - d) This requires we define our terms, which requires us to know our history.
 - i) The “Congregationalism” as described by the modern Congregationalists we want nothing to do with.
 - ii) So, where should we go to remain faithful Congregationalists?

¹ https://quintapress.webmate.me/PDF_Books/John_Cotton/The_Cambridge_Platform_v1.pdf

² www.ucc.org/

- 6) Thus, today's sermon is one I have to apologize for.
 - a) Sermons should not be just history lectures.
 - b) Sermons are the proclamation of Christ's Gospel, and God's Law, through the careful explaining of Scripture, with the call to repent, believe and follow.
 - c) However, understanding our history is not just an intellectual exercise, but a critical thing for this congregation to understand in order to make faithful decisions.
 - d) Remember, *"Thus says the Lord, 'stand by the ways and see and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; And you will find rest for your souls.'"*
– Jeremiah 6:16a
 - e) So, with your patience, let me tell you our history.

Origins

- 1) It is in the Year of our Lord 1643, London.
 - a) The Protestant Reformation (returning the church to ancient biblical Christianity) was started by Martin Luther (1483-1546), in Germany, 126 years earlier (1517 AD), and has spread throughout Europe.
 - b) About 100 years earlier (cir. 1555 AD) Geneva, in modern Switzerland, has because the epic-center of Reformed Protestantism under John Calvin (1509-1564), which encourages Reformed Protestantism throughout Europe and into the new world.
 - c) The Reformation came to England 120 years ago with King Henry VIII (r. 1509-1547 AD), who embraced Protestantism for political reasons (wanted a divorce, control of church wealth in England). Though he broke from the corrupt Roman Catholic Church, he kept the new English church very conservative (i.e. medieval) in its practices.
 - i) This is called the Anglican Church – the official state church of the United Kingdom.
 - It still exists today, with King Charles as it's head.
 - In America it is called the Episcopal Church, from the word for "bishop."
 - ii) The King of England, with his bishops, would govern the English Church, this is called an **episcopal** form of church government (top down).
 - iii) A growing number of "Puritans" in Britain wanted a more biblical, purified, church following Reformed Theology.
 - iv) English monarchs, however, became more and more medieval, if not Roman Catholic.
 - v) The Puritans gain strength especially in Scotland and in London and begin to control Parliament more and more.
- 2) The tension finally exploded last year (1642 AD) the British Isles descended into the English Civil War (1642-1651 AD).
 - a) The Puritans control London, and Parliament.
 - i) They do away with the Anglican/Episcopal (king/bishop governed) Church.
 - ii) Of course, the church is critical for a just and good society, thus Parliament wants the (Puritan) clergy, called "divines", to create new foundational documents for a new purified English Church.
- 3) So, in 1643, the English Parliament calls the Westminster Assembly, meeting in Westminster Abbey in London, to fully purify the church of England.

The Westminster Assembly

- 1) The Assembly meets from 1643 to 1653 and restructures the English Church.
 - a) Several Scottish "divines" (i.e. clergy, theologians, etc.) attend since Scotland was more advanced in purifying/reforming the church.
 - b) The Scots Confession, created in 1560, was very influential.
 - c) Scotland officially, adopted a **presbyterian** system of government.
 - i) Where elders would govern a local church.
 - ii) The local elders from the churches in a region would form a presbytery to govern that region. And the all the presbyteries together could gather to form an assembly to govern the national church. Thus, the Westminster Assembly.
- 2) One of the major issues of contention was church government.
 - a) The majority were generally presbyterian, wanting a government by regional elders.
 - b) There were a few friendly "*dissenting brethren*" at Westminster, who argued for a **congregational** approach.
- 3) These were not radical Congregationalists but conservative Congregationalists.
 - a) The radical Congregationalists, called Independents, Dissenters, Separatists, and/or Brownists (named after an early Separatist, Robert Browne, d.1633), who rejected any idea of a state church, and believed in total autonomy for any local church.
 - b) The most famous group of Brownists were the American Pilgrims who left Europe on the Mayflower and founded Plymouth Colony in 1620 AD.
- 4) These more conservative Congregationalists attended the Westminster Assembly, and believed:
 - a) They were not radical Brownists/Independents.
 - b) They believed local elders should govern the daily affairs of the local church.
 - c) Being part of a universal/catholic church is biblical and important and that local elders should gather on a regional, or national level, when necessary.
 - d) A national/state church is fine.
 - e) They thought (full) presbyterianism went too far and instead believed the final say should be with the members of a local church, that the local church is self-governing, and that the regional/national, church could not impose its will on a local congregation.
- 5) So, there was much agreement.
 - a) They fully agreed about the core doctrines of the Reformed Faith (e.g. nature of God, salvation, authority of the Bible, how to worship, etc.)
 - b) They were very close on church government. (elders, universal/national church, regional gatherings, all Christians are saints, etc.)
 - i) As we read in Acts 15.
 - ii) The first great church council to solve a universal issue in the greater, catholic (i.e. universal) church.
 - c) The debate, like so many debates in the church, is over focus, where you put the emphasis.
 - i) To our sermon text: Acts 15:4 - "*When they (Paul & Barnabas) arrived at Jerusalem, they were received by the congregation (ekklēsia, the church, the assembly) and the apostles and the presbyters (presbyteroi, elders), and they reported all that God had done with them.*"

- ii) Clearly, they have elders (presbyters) and the congregation (members).
 - iii) The debate is not one or the other but where should you point the emphasis.
 - For the Presbyterians it is with the regional elders, the presbytery.
 - For the Congregationalists it is with the local voting the members, the congregation.
- 6) Five leading Congregational divines (Thomas Goodwin, Philip Nye, Sidrach Simpson, Jeremiah Burroughs & William Bridge) in 1643 wrote "An Apologeticall Narration" and submitted it to Parliament (not the Assembly) defending the conservative Congregational position.³
- i) By the way, these divines are well worth your read, especially Thomas Goodwin (1600-1680) and Jeremiah Burroughs (1599-1646), which some can be found in modern English.
 - ii) To give a few examples:
 - The Heart of Christ in Heaven Towards Sinners on Earth by Goodwin.
 - The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment by Burroughs.
 - Irenicum: Healing the Divisions Among God's People by Burroughs.
- 7) Though the Presbyterians were more numerous in the Westminster Assembly, the Congregationalists held sway back in New England.
- a) The settlers that followed after the Pilgrims in New England, such as in Salem, MA in 1626 and 1628, were not Separatists, but more conservative Puritans.
 - b) Soon the Separatist Pilgrims were assumed into the more conservative Congregational Puritans who very much believed in a state church.
 - i) As seen by the fact they created schools to train their clergy. (Harvard in 1636 and Yale in 1701).
 - ii) And that many New England colonies didn't disestablish the state Congregational Church until well after the American Revolution: 1790 in New Hampshire, 1818 in Connecticut, 1833 in Massachusetts.
 - c) In 1648, in order to influence the on-going Westminster Assembly, the Congregationalists in New England created the Cambridge Platform to spell out in detail what they thought church government should look like along Congregational lines.
 - d) In the 1640's the famous Boston Congregational divine, John Cotton (1585-1652), probably coined the term "Congregationalist" to describe this group and to emphasize they were not Separatists.
- 8) In the end, the Westminster Assembly went full Presbyterian, finishing their work in 1649 and created the foundational and definitional documents of Presbyterianism called "Westminster Standards", which include:
- a) Westminster Confession of Faith (1646 AD)
 - b) Westminster Shorter Catechism (1647 AD)
 - c) Westminster Larger Catechism (1647 AD)
 - d) Directory of Public Worship (1644 AD)
 - e) Form of Church Government (1645 AD)
- 9) The Congregationalists would fully accept the Shorter & Larger Catechisms, since they don't mention church government.

³ https://quintapress.webmate.me/PDF_Books/Apologetical_Narration.pdf

- a) In 1658 the Congregationalists took the Westminster Confession and slightly modified it, creating the Savoy Declaration, which became the official creed of the state churches in New England.
- b) This shows how close the Congregationalists and Presbyterians were, except about church government.
- c) By the way, the Reformed Baptists would take the Savoy and modify it to be Baptist in theology and created the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689.

After Westminster

1) Presbyterian England did not last long.

- a) In 1659 Puritan Commonwealth ceased, and in 1660 Charles II of the previous royal line of Stuarts, was asked to come back to England to be the new English king.
- b) The Anglican Church, with its bishops, were reinstated.
- c) Thus, English Presbyterians became *de facto* Independents in England.
- d) The English Presbyterians and Congregationalists/Independents endured grave restrictions (see The Clarendon Code) until the Acts of Toleration of 1689 which allowed freedom of worship to Presbyterians, Congregationalists and Baptists.
- e) Though Presbyterianism did remain in control of Scotland and the Presbyterian Church of Scotland is still the state church of Scotland today, though it is thoroughly compromised with theological liberalism, as is the Anglican state church of England.

2) Congregationalism thrived in New England.

- a) In early America the Congregationalists were arguably the largest, wealthiest and best educated of all the denominations.
 - i) Harvard and Yale created very educated clergy.
 - ii) Boston was the richest and largest city.
 - iii) The Congregationalists created famous missionary societies.
- b) Congregationalism democratic principles massively influenced not just the United States, but the entire world.
- c) Remember my seminary advisor's favorite line, "Nothing fails like success."
 - i) We will save that story for next week.
 - ii) For now, what happened to the Presbyterians?

3) In the early 18th century many Presbyterians immigrated to the United States, especially in the "Middle Colonies" (Delaware, New Jersey, New York & Pennsylvania).

- a) In 1706, Francis Makemie (1658-1708), an Ulster Scots, considered the "father of American Presbyterianism", along with several other pastors established the first presbytery in North American, the Presbytery of Philadelphia.
- b) In 1746 the Presbyterians created Princeton University to train their clergy.
- c) 1789 the American Presbyterians made a few minor changes to the Westminster Confession.
 - i) Especially, they removed language about the civil magistrate from being involved in church matters.

- ii) This shows the massive impact of the American democratic spirit that influenced all different Christian groups in the USA.
 - iii) Since the Presbyterians couldn't have a state church, they took on more Congregational elements.⁴
- 4) As the Presbyterians became more influenced by American democratic thinking, the Congregationalists and Presbyterians would join together.
- a) In 1708 the Saybrook Platform was created in Saybrook, Connecticut.
 - i) The leaders of Connecticut were distressed that the colony was declining in faithfulness and church discipline.
 - ii) The colonial legislature called for divines to meet at Saybrook to bring those with Congregational and Presbyterian leanings to renew Connecticut for Christ.
 - iii) This was possible because traditional conservative Congregationalists believed in:
 - Elders govern local churches.
 - Regional gatherings of elders should meet to deal with larger issues.
 - iv) While American Presbyterians were becoming more democratic because they had no state church and were living in America.
 - b) In 1801 the Congregational Churches of New England and the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America joined together in "The Plan of Union" to mutually support each other and to have a joint effort to evangelize the American frontier. This union lasted until 1852.
 - c) In 1972 the United Reformed Church was created in the UK, joining together the Congregational Church in England and Wales with the Presbyterian Church of England.
- 5) There is no doubt that Congregationalists and Presbyterians are very close cousins.
- 6) But what about the problem?
- a) What happened to the Congregationalists?
 - b) Next week we will have part 2, describing tidal wave of theological liberalism that will destroy Congregationalism and much, though not all, of Presbyterianism.
 - c) For today, note how early the problem begins.
 - i) Connecticut was concerned it was going liberal in 1700!
 - ii) There was a fear (correctly) that Boston, and Massachusetts were going liberal.
 - iii) One of the reasons Yale was created in 1701 was because there was a fear that Harvard (created in 1636) had gone liberal.
- 7) Where the great Congregational clergy training schools of Harvard and Yale would quickly surrender to theological liberalism, the Presbyterian school of Princeton would hold out into the early 20th century.
- 8) We will continue with the story next week.

⁴ American Revisions to the Westminster Confession of Faith see:
https://www.opc.org/documents/WCF_orig.html

Conclusion

- 1) Let me restate my assumptions that we at TRC need to ponder, evaluate and if necessary challenge if wrong:
 - a) We (TRC) are responsible to remain faithful and this requires work and vigilance.
 - b) We believe the best way to do this is be grounded in Scripture, the inerrant written Word of God.
 - c) We believe the Reformed Tradition of our Congregational fore-fathers is the best expression of biblical historical Christianity. Including congregational government.
 - d) We are not an island unto ourselves, we are called to be part of the catholic/universal church, and we need help.
 - 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) Remember Acts 15:4 – *“When they (Paul & Barnabas) arrived at Jerusalem, they were received by the congregation (ekklēsia, the church, the assembly) and the apostles and the presbyters (presbyteroi, elders), and they reported all that God had done with them.”*
 - a) Note the groups:
 - i) The Congregation: The gathering, the assembling, of all Christians.
 - ii) The Apostles: Those handpicked by the Lord Jesus, who had seen the risen Christian who had full authority in the church, whose authority is now found in Scripture.
 - iii) The Presbyters: Elders that govern local churches.
 - b) The correct balancing of local with the catholic/universal, and the correct balance of the elders and the congregation, requires much reflection, study and vigilance.
- 3) For we desire that we may proclaim what God has done with us.
And we pray that it be by His mercy for His glory.