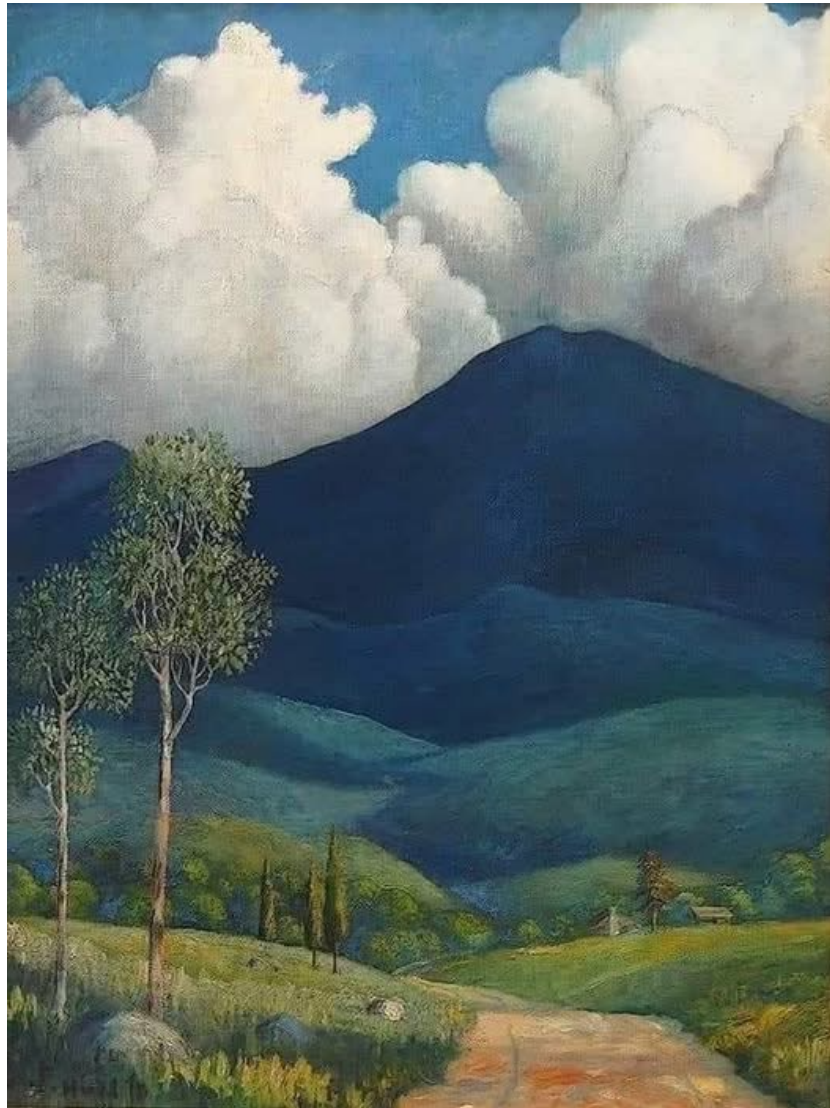


FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
of Los Angeles

Epiphany 4
The Light of Identifying
25 January 2026



Blue Mountain, 1960
Peter Hurd

540 S. Commonwealth Avenue, Los Angeles, California 90020
Telephone 213.385.1341 – www.FCCLA.org

The Gathering of the People

First Congregational Church of Los Angeles is a safe place for all people, and we celebrate our diversity of race, creed, age, ability, gender, religion, cultural background, sexual orientation, gender identities and expressions... We extend a warm welcome to all this morning and especially those who are with us for the first time. Your presence both enriches us and this time of celebration together ~

Please note that our services are live streamed at fccla.org/live.

Organ Prelude Concert

Dr. Christoph Bull, Organist-in-Residence

Hymn Improvisation

Variations on B-A-C-H

Jesu, Joy Of Man's Desiring, BWV 147, and beyond (Bull after Bach)

Ciacona ex g, BWV 1179 (Johann Sebastian Bach)

Well-tempered Variations on a Bach Prelude in D minor (Bull after Bach)

Chiming of the Hour

Welcome

Rev. Michael Lehman

Words of Gathering

Rev. Lehman & Ayur Barduev

A multiplicity of function
holds us upright in our days
and guides us through
responses and reactions
that claim us for ourselves.

How we are
crafts us more surely into who we are
than any single detail
of inheritance or learning.

In this hour together,
may we dis-order
our smooth and supple responses,
explore their weights and counterbalances
to find out who the 'we' behind the
'how we are' really is.

May what we dis-cover
open us to new understandings
and new ways to be
that bless us more fully into becoming
who we would have ourselves become.

Please stand now, in body or in spirit, for our Hymn of Gathering

***Hymn of Gathering**

God of Change and God of Glory

CWM RHONDDA

God of change and God of glory, God of time and God of space,
when we fear our future story, give to us your loving grace.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, give us still the gift to praise,
give us still the gift to praise.

God of many different colors, God of many different signs,
You have made all of us different, blessings for all humankind.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, let your love cast out our fear,
Let your love cast out our fear.

Freshness of the light of morning, freshness of the light of night,
You are still creating stories of your grace and of your light.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, for the gifts from one great heart,
For the gifts from one great heart.

--lyrics adapted from A. Carmines

***Prayer of Awareness**

Rev. Lehman

Holy One,
we awake to this new day
with all of its possibilities,
its uncertainties,
its many faces,
and its underlying mystery.

Help us to be able –
in your strength –
to move through this day,
letting go of all that takes
our attention away from
the miracles around us,
so that,
when we meet our neighbor
or encounter a stranger,
we will recognize
your face, and our own.

Amen and Amen!

[adapt / An Iona Prayer Book]

***Introit**

"Light Of The Clear Blue Morning"
Laude

DOLLY PARTON, arr. DAVID HARRIS

***The Lord's Prayer**

Ayur Barduev

*Our [God], 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 debts,
as we forgive our debtors.*

*And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
forever. Amen.*

***Gloria Deo**

Glory be to God, and to the Christ and to the Holy Ghost,
As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be.
World without end, Amen, Amen.

***Passing of the Peace**

Rev. Lehman

Today
now
this moment
may you see
the presence of God
in the face of another
and, in your seeing,
may you find peace,
may you find life. [adapt/jrichardson]

This morning, may the Peace of God be with you.
And also with you!

You are invited to share this ancient greeting with a bow

Please be seated

Reading from Our Religious Tradition
from the Gospel of Luke, chapter 5

Ayur Barduev

This is the Gospel of Grace...
Thanks be to God!

Prayers with the People

Rev. Lehman

Invitation to Silence and Prayer

Silence

Prayer of Our Hearts

Eternal One,
we have gathered to renew our confidence
in a more illumined future,
as we enter your kindom,
here and now
as a foretaste of what is to come.

We long to give ourselves to this emerging future,
knowing that all our choices,
no matter how small,
resonate across every strand of this cosmic web.

We know, O God, that we are not alone
as people who are longing for a future that is secure.

It is our fear that keeps us looking
back over our shoulder,
and yet the Spirit is with us.
Let us not forget that are you with us -
in our passion to create this future,
and in our resolve to overcome all that keeps us
from your dream for all creation.

Lift us up, abiding Spirit,
above all obstacles,
and grant us a glimpse
of what is possible
when hearts and minds
discover that you are in our fears,
our hopes, and our commitments. [bsanguin/adaptlvf]

This morning, may it be so.
May it be so for all of us, O God.
Amen and Amen.

Meditation Anthem

"Beach Spring"

Grace Sheldon-Williams, *Hand Bells*, and Christoph Bull, *Organ*

arr. VALERIE STEPHENSON &
CHRISTINE D. ANDERSON

Sermon

The Light of Identifying

Rev. Laura Vail Fregin

The Eucharist and Blessings

Rev. Fregin & Rev. Lehman

Words of Invitation and Remembrance

We have lovingly been called to be a people of God.
Having been given this bread and cup as a reminder of God's love,
we now listen for God's presence in silence and in sound –
we listen in the voices of all people,
we listen to the music of creation,
and in this way, we are reconnected to God
through this holy meal.
In this time may we hear the voice
that calls us home to our Creator, Christ, and Spirit.

We remember the stories of Jesus,
the one who did not have a house of their own,
and yet found home whenever they came to the table with their friends.
To help them remember God's great love for them,
Jesus would take the bread, hold it up for all to see,
and say, 'When you eat this, remember the love with which it is given.'
And then, Jesus would take a cup of the fruit of the vine,
pouring it out for all of them to see and saying,
'This cup is poured out for you – remember the love
that you are now called to give.'

Prayer of Blessing

God of fresh bread and newly harvested fruit of the vine,
we sense your presentness among us
in grace-filled moments of sharing,
in carefully created communities of loving solidarity,
in holy times of birthing new life
from the renewing of our minds.

*We delight in the moving of your steadfast Spirit
that calls us to find water for the thirsty,
invites us to prepare meals
for all who hunger, and
gives us the gifts to welcome all in our midst.*

May it ever be so.
Amen and Amen.

Sharing of the Bread and the Cup

At this table we celebrate all the diverse ways we have been created. Everyone is invited to share in this feast. This morning we will receive communion with gluten free wafers and grape juice. You are invited to come forward to receive these gifts and then light a candle to signify the prayers of your heart on this day. As we share this time, we remember that this is the bread of new life and the cup of hope, given in love for each of us.

Invitation to Generosity

Rev. Lehman

At First Church, we consider every pledge, tithe, offering and contribution a gift for the life of our community of faith. No matter how they're given, our gifts show gratitude. You are invited to visit our website at fccla.org/give. Our hospitality team will also bring baskets for your in-person gifts during the Offertory.

Offertory

"Oh How Amiable"
Cathedral Choir

RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

***Doxology**

From all that dwell below the skies,
let the Creator's praise arise!
Alleluia! Alleluia!
Your name shall sound and praises soar
till suns shall rise and set no more.
Alleluia! Alleluia!
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

[adapt/Isaac Watts, 1719]

***Offering Prayer**

Ayur Barduev

Holy One,
today we have remembered,
the world we live in is filled with challenges,
with crises, with pain, with disappointment.
We are people who know these things intimately
because we have felt them, experienced them,
and railed against them.

And yet, we ask O God, that you will help us to not grow weary
but instead to rise as those who would see not only
what the world is
but what we can make it be,
guided by your grace and mercy
as we become your hands, your heart, your voice
in making it so
in this, our time and place.

*We offer these gifts now,
and ask that your dream for the world
will continue to rise.*

May it be so.
May it be so for all of us.
Amen and Amen.

Please be seated

Life at First Church

Rev. Fregin & Rev. Lehman

Words of Blessing

Rev. Fregin

May God's light guide you wherever you walk in this world.
May God's light encourage you in your daily work.
May God's light work in you like yeast, and rise in you like hope!
May you taste and see God's goodness
and may God's wisdom be your delight
now, and for evermore. [JSPickard/bb]

Amen! May it be so!

Choral Response

"Break Forth, O Beauteous Heavenly Light"
Cathedral Choir

J.S. BACH

***Hymn for the Journey**

Arise, Shine Out, Your Light Has Come

THE GIFT OF LOVE

Arise, shine out, your light has come, unfolding city of our dreams.
On distant hills a glory gleams: the new creation has begun.

Above earth's valleys, thick with night, high on your walls the dawn appears,
And history shall dry all its tears, as nations stream towards your light.

The sounds of violence shall cease as dwellings of salvation rise
To sparkle in eternal skies from avenues of praise and peace.

The dancing air shall glow with light, and sun and moon give up their place,
When love shines out of every face, our good, our glory, and delight.

Postlude

Dr. Christoph Bull, Organist-in-Residence

Prelude in D minor from *Das Wohltemperierte Klavier* (Johann Sebastian Bach)

Inside The Music

"Our brains are prediction-based. The brain takes action before we have consciously processed any situation. By the time we are consciously aware of what we're doing, the action, emotion, or thought is already underway. Our identity, therefore, grows from predictions built over time through repetition. Who we believe ourselves to be is a function of what we've done in the past. I'm drawn to Vaughan Williams' "O How Amiable" for this reason. He wrote the piece to be part of a play that his friend E.M. Forster wrote to raise money for the renovation of a local church. The whole thing was an expression of a small community coming together to improve their neighborhood. We know that he had begun to conceive of his famous "Dona Nobis Pacem" by then. He was very much aware of the world-wide financial hardship and of the rising threat of the Nazi party in Germany. Members of England's Parliament were already starting to talk about war again, and Vaughan Williams was part of a movement to remind people of their humanity, and what happened the previous time Europe went to war. Like today, there were a lot of people asking who they were in the face of a rapidly changing world. Their predictions didn't align with the world around them any longer. The identity they had forged for themselves through repetition, and therefore the very idea of truth that they relied on, was evaporating in front of their eyes. A small town beautifying their church must have felt like a centering experience for someone like Vaughan Williams. Into this moment he wrote "O How Amiable" using great simplicity and craftsmanship. The entire piece is energized by the interval of a rising perfect fourth that we hear in the organ as it begins, and in the first two notes of the choir. He draws this interval from the hymn "O God Our Help In Ages Past" that he quotes at the end of the song, which uses the same interval liberally. This opening interval is the one thrust of energy in the piece. Even when the volume builds to forte, and he changes the interval to a perfect fifth, we don't feel the same jolt. I think that might be because of how he follows the perfect fourth. Unlike the hymn, that proceeds in leaps, he leaves the leap of the fourth with a flowing, step-wise drift toward the lower octave key note. It's almost as if he is musically capturing the value of sensory awareness to our identity experience. Our senses are the one tool we have to counter our predictions, and thereby build new predictions. The perfect fourth feels like the known quantity, the prediction fulfilled. Everything else feels like our minds and bodies opening to what is in the present through our awareness. He provides us a musical map to release ourselves into being. I also find it fascinating that he chose Psalm 84 for this expression. This is a Psalm often used in funerary settings, as it pictures God's dwellings. Longing to feel connected to the divine rests at the heart of this Psalm, as it does at the heart of "O How Amiable." We can hear him encouraging us to realize that the world we think ought to exist reveals our own prediction-based personal realities. By contrast, we can open ourselves into a connection with the divine, and in doing so, feel the amiable nature of God's dwelling within us. This is not a piece for a soul departed. It is music for souls finding their identity and their place here in this moment. Whatever radical changes are in store for our world, he was sharing with his contemporaries and with us, we have the capacity to be present with ourselves, and in doing so, become a people who identify as integrated into the divine web of life." ~ Dr. David Harris