

First Congregational Church Weekly Newsletter

East Longmeadow, MA



July 1, 2026

PASTORAL MEDITATION by Rev. Thomas Hawkins

THE SOMETHING MORE OF ALL THINGS

Japanese theologian Kosuke Koyama once wrote a small book of meditations originally intended for use by his family. It was later published for a wider public as *Fifty Meditations*.

In one meditation Koyama tells a story about chickens. He was, at the time, a visiting lecturer at a theological school in Timor, an island that is part of Indonesia. Everywhere he went, including as he entered his classroom building each day, he was surrounded by chickens. So he said to his students one day, “You see many chickens every day because our school runs a poultry farm and you, as students, breed chickens for your personal income. So “What do you see when you see chickens?”

One student answered, “When I see chickens, I see eggs and I can sell them and make money.” Another student said, “When I see chickens, I see God. God created chickens for us to eat.” Still another student replied, “When I see chickens, I see a good family life. A hen impresses me always as a good mother who takes care of her chicks.” A fourth student added, “When I see chickens, I see the difference between a [human] and an animal. A chicken doesn’t have understanding as I do. We are superior to chickens.”

Once all his students had explained how they each saw chickens differently, Koyama began his lecture by pointing out how “we have found out so many interesting things from which we can begin our theological discussion. We all see *something more* when we see a chicken. A chicken is not just a chicken... rice is not just rice. The sun is not just the sun. Rain is not just rain. A house is not just a house. A water buffalo is not just a water buffalo. Everything has *something more*.” (pp. 15-16)

This summer’s sermon series on “metaphors of God” is an invitation to follow Koyama’s insight that there is “something more” we can learn from the simple, everyday objects around them that biblical authors repeatedly use as metaphors for God and God’s ways. A rock is not just a rock. It possesses “something more” that discloses God’s steadfastness and strength. Fire, as we learned this past Sunday, possesses “something more” that reveals to us a divine energy that enlivens but does not consume. Over the next few weeks we will continue to look at biblical references to everyday things like light and water whose “something more” reveals important truths about God.

Each in July, as we have been doing in June, I will include in the bulletin a simple, take-home spiritual exercise that invites us to meditate on the object from the natural world whose meaning we’ve explored in worship.

Since this Sunday’s worship includes Communion, we will be looking at the “something more” of bread. Bread is mentioned from the story of Adam and Eve to the Book of Proverbs, from Jesus’ Bread of Life discourse to Paul’s letters. The book of Ezekiel even includes a recipe for making bread.

In his book *Our Daily Bread*, the Bosnian-Croatian philosopher Predrag Matvejević calls bread “the condition of peace and the cause of war, the promise of hope and the reason for despair.” He goes on to describe how bread is a central symbol – a kind of verbal shorthand – for what holds us together as human beings and what nourishes us both physically and spiritually. Bread is shorthand for something very elemental and mysterious in our lives and world, he writes. The history of bread, he says, is the history of humanity itself. How we treat bread reveals the essence of who we are. It is therefore a universal symbol of holiness and the sacred.

Much of Matvejević’s interest in bread comes from a story of hunger and bread that his father (a Russian speaker from the Ukraine who had married a Bosnian Croat woman) told him from his time as a prisoner in a Nazi work camp. The end of 1942 and the beginning of 1943 saw one of the harshest winters of the century. In northern Germany, his father would be marched back every evening along with his freezing, starving fellow inmates in ragged clothes and wooden clogs to the barracks after another day of back-breaking manual labor. “We didn’t look human anymore. It was as if we had turned into mere shadows of ourselves,” his father remembered.

One particular evening, they were intercepted on a narrow road by a stranger who invited them to his house. Accompanied by their guard, his father and the other inmates entered the house mistrustfully. It was Christmas Eve. The stranger was a Protestant pastor who first gave his guests an opportunity to wash and warm up. They were then invited to his table, on which he had placed a slice of bread and glass of wine for each of his guests. It was followed afterwards with a simple meal. In gratitude, Matvejević's father sat down at the piano and, his fingers stiff from work and frozen from the cold, played a fragment of an old Russian liturgy. When the stay was over, the pastor and the inmates embraced each other. Their guard did not report any of them to his commanding officer.

The story, Matvejević concludes, illustrates the "something more" of bread: Hospitality and compassion. It speaks subtly of Jesus' breaking bread and telling his disciples to "do this in memory of me" as more than just a religious ritual but as an everyday ethical imperative. That German pastor's simple slice of bread on Christmas Eve contained a "something more" of seeing people and their deepest needs across our usual boundaries of culture and language and tradition.

Our daily bread isn't simply carbs, as our diet guidelines tell us. There is a spiritual depth to bread that we simultaneously know and always forget. In a culture that appears to crave nothing but endless distraction, bread reminds us of our physical and spiritual connection to others and to God.

We break bread each month when we gather at the Lord's Table to help us remember who we are and who our Lord invites us to become.

With prayer, Pastor Thomas

SUNDAY WORSHIP FOR JULY 5 in BULTER HALL

Due to the impending heat, Sunday worship for July 5 is moved to the cooler air-conditioned Butler Hall.

SUMMER SERMON SERIES EXPLORES "METAPHORS OF THE DIVINE"

This summer we will step away from the Revised Common Lectionary, which follows continuous readings from Matthew's gospel and instead have a six-week series of sermons entitled "Metaphors of the Divine."

Each week will examine a different name, image, or metaphor for God, all of which arise from a phenomenon in nature and that the Bible itself uses as a descriptor or name for God. Sermons will explore what these biblical names reveal about God as well as include one or more specific suggestions for a concrete practice based on that week's name or metaphor for God that we will be invited to experience during the following week.

These themes are:

- July 5 - Bread
- July 12 - Silence
- July 19 - Water
- July 26 - Light

I hope you'll join us if you are in town. And if you are away on weekends, there's always our online service or the uploaded versions available later in the week.

See you in worship! Pastor Thomas

NOTE FROM THE YWCA CEO

Dear Congregation members,

THANK YOU very much for your fabulous donation of toiletries for women and children to the YWCA on 6/1/26. I deeply appreciate your ongoing generosity and thoughtfulness. At the YWCA we can always use these type of donations. Once again, thank you.

SUMMER OFFICE HOURS

The office is open on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays from 9:00 am - 12:00 pm. Also note, during the summer, the newsletter is distributed every other week. The next weekly newsletter will be July 15.

KENSINGTON FOOD PANTRY

Our cupboards are bare. All the bins, boxes and tables are empty in our food pantry. We just finished another year of supplying food to families at Kensington School. Now we are planning for the next school year. Thru the summer we are hoping you can help us to fill all our shelves with good food to start helping families in September once again. When you are shopping for your own families, try to remember to pick up a few things for our Kensington Families. When you see a sale, a BOGO or are shopping at the Dollar Store, you can help us to be ready for the new school year in September. I will leave a stack of reusable grocery bags on the puzzle cupboard in the breezeway. If you would like to take one and fill it up during the summer, we would be so grateful to you for your help. Thanks

A Note from the Business & Finance Board

Owners of a traditional, rollover, inherited, SEP or SIMPLE IRAs, and who are older than 70 ½ can satisfy their annual required minimum distribution (RMD) by distributing the money directly to a charity of their choice. For example, if you want to pledge say \$2,000 to the church, this amount would be transferred directly from your IRA as a Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD) to the church's account and would reduce your RMD by that amount. This means that this money will not be added to your yearly income thus reducing your income tax. You will not get a charitable deduction for this money but since only 1/10th of taxpayers itemize this is a beneficial tradeoff.

Note: owners of 401k accounts can roll them into a rollover IRA. I realize that this suggestion can seem quite confusing so I will be available after worship on Sundays to answer any questions.

PRAYER

This prayer is from St. Cyril of Alexandria, 5th-century bishop and patriarch of Alexandria. The prayer invites us to bless those with whom we break bread, both at the Lord's Table and in our homes. It is a remarkably hospitable prayer from an early theologian viewed by church historians as unusually combative and constantly embroiled in theological or political controversies.

The Blessing of God rest upon all those who have been kind to us, have cared for us, have worked for us, have served us, and have shared our bread with us at this table. O merciful God, reward all of them in your own way. For yours is the glory and honor forever. Amen.



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