

Good Sunday morning from a cold, sunny hill in Rockport.....

Last Sunday morning I reflected on “burdens of uncertainty” in my opening words. After the shattering event in our nation’s capital this week on the steps and within the halls of the United States Capitol, the prophetic nature of that thought is not lost on me....

This Sunday in my sermon, I should be focusing on one or both of the “celebrations” within the Christian tradition – the Epiphany, which occurred on January 6, and the Baptism of Jesus which is usually the focus of today, the “first Sunday after the Epiphany.” BUT, I’ll save a focus on those two Christian celebrations for another Sunday.... except to say that this week the news has probably brought many of us to a new “epiphany.” In the Christian tradition, Epiphany is “a Christian festival, observed on January 6, commemorating the manifestation of Christ to the gentiles [those who are not Jews] in the persons of the Magi.” (from iPhone Dictionary) In non-theological terms, an epiphany is “a sudden, intuitive perception of or insight into the reality or essential meaning of something, usually initiated by some simple, homely, or commonplace occurrence or experience.” (from iPhone Dictionary)

There was nothing simple, homely, or commonplace about what happened in our nation’s capital at the US Capitol this past Wednesday. What happened was extraordinarily shocking and saddening. The epiphany it brought me to is this – democracy offers us not only the freedom to express our differences in orderly, respectful ways, but also in ugly, destructive ways. And further, our democracy, our freedoms, are more fragile than I could have ever imagined before Wednesday. From a citizen-of-this-country perspective, I am horrified. As an ordained minister of the United Church of Christ, I am saddened beyond belief that respect for God and country has been thrown into such a nightmare of hatred and destruction.

BUT, we have to go forward. We have to work together to get through this national mess. We have to remember that wars and times of upheaval from the past have been endured and overcome. We have to love one another, no matter what. We have to pray for peace and wellbeing for every American citizen. We have to finally acknowledge the fact that we are not all on the same page when it comes to what it means to be an American. What does it mean to you? Can we work to understand what it means to those with whom we do not agree? These are not easy questions. There are no simple, homely or commonplace answers. That is now more evident than it ever was before this past Wednesday, January 6, the day of Epiphany in the Christian tradition.

I know I’ve said this before, **AND** I want to say again how much I appreciate all your responses to my meditations, especially in these challenging times. I don’t always get

a chance to respond to each of your reflections, **AND** please know I read all of them, ponder them, and give thanks for them.... Your support spurs me on and gives me hope for the future of us all....

Blessings to each one on this second Sunday of the new year..... Susan

p.s. I will ATTEMPT to download today's scripture reading and sermon to my Facebook page later today: freerangepastor for anyone who wants to tune in.... and I believe Margie is also downloading my sermons to Federated's Facebook page....

**A simple online worship service for Sunday, January 10, 2021
as prepared by Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet
Pastor of the Federated Church of Thomaston**

A Call to Worship

God of grace, we come to worship today in cyberspace
so that we might be held in community in spirit if not in body.
We come to be cared for in our sorrows and to share in our joys.
We come seeking strength and renewal,
because we long to be in relationship with you.
We come blessed because we know your generosity is not contained only to
ourselves,
but your arms open wide and gather all that is into your home.
With thankful hearts, we join the saints of the church past, present, and future
in singing your praise (silently for now) and worshipping you this day.
Amen.

A prayer to ponder....

Creator of us all, help me remember life is not a race – but indeed a journey.
Help me to be honest and work hard.
Remind me to say “thank you,” “I love you,” and “great job” to someone each day.
Remind me to take time for worship and prayer each day.
Help me to love my life and what I've been given.
Remind me that it is not accidental.
Help me search for my purpose, to do it as best I can.
Remind me to laugh often, to appreciate the little things in life and enjoy them.
Never let me forget the best things really are free.
Help me not to worry, as less wrinkles are more becoming.
Help me to forgive because it frees the soul.
Remind me to take time for myself and plan for longevity.

Help me to recognize the special people I've been blessed to know.
Help me to live for today and enjoy the moment.
Amen.

~
adapted from "Living Life," by Bonnie Mohr

Readings of Scripture

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."
Mark 1:14-15

[Jesus] also said to the crowds, "When you see a cloud rising in the west, you immediately say, 'It is going to rain'; and so it happens. And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, 'There will be a scorching heat'; and it happens. You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?"
Luke 12:54-56

[Paul said,] "Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy."
Romans 13:11-13

[Paul said,] "As we work together with him [Jesus], we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. For he says, 'At an acceptable time I have listened to you, and on a day of salvation I have helped you.' See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation!"
2 Corinthians 6:1-2

“Today decides tomorrow” A sermon based on Mark 1:14-15, Luke 12:54-56, Romans 13:11-13, & 2 Corinthians 6:1-2

Be with me in the spirit of prayer. Wise God, teach us about timeliness in these moments. Remind us that it is the *season* of our lives, not the *hour of the*

day that will make the difference in all our tomorrows. Help us to envision the *bigger* picture of our future rather than the *smallness* of our daily "to do" lists. Amen.

"Today decides tomorrow." Those words don't come specifically from the Bible. They don't come from any self help book I've read. I've never seen them on a bumper sticker. I read them etched on a stone on the campus of Chico State University in northern California several years ago. For some reason, they struck a cord in my mind. I pulled out my little "smart phone" and wrote them down on my iPhone "note pad."

"Today decides tomorrow." Well, does it? Does today decide tomorrow? Or does *yesterday* decide tomorrow in some way in our lives -- either because of some negative thing that happened, or some positive event, or some birth, or death, or departure? We are now in a time of transition in our country. We have had a week of death, destruction and mayhem in our country, specifically in our nation's capital, at the United States Capitol. "Does today decide tomorrow"? I believe, as Americans, we have to be asking ourselves that question, seriously, introspectively, and honestly.....

After spending the past twenty years in ministry, I've learned a few things. I've learned that personal agendas, past hurts, and many errors and omissions can take their toll on a person's life, or a congregation's growth, or a nation's movement into the future. Will there be progress and positive cooperation all around as we move forward? Or will there be more of the past, both positive and sometimes very negative, determining how the months and years ahead will go?

I'm pretty sure there are a variety of opinions floating around amongst you as to how we should move forward, individually, as a community of faith, as a nation. The challenge, it seems to me, is to move *beyond* daily "to do" lists and individual opinions about what should come next and into honestly and openly envisioning a bigger picture of our future together. Knowing full well how we exist as living entities, when a change of pastor or president is in the air, I know some folks welcome the changes and others resist them like dogs unwilling to give up their bones. This has been the messy, untidy and totally human reality of "church life" for the past two thousand years.... Just read the Bible to find that out! And it has been the messy, untidy and totally human reality of our national life in these recent months and weeks.

To put a lighter note, but still a serious one, on this point of today determining tomorrow, I always remember the Peanuts cartoon strip where in the first frame, Lucy proclaims, "Timeliness is next to Godliness." In the next frame, Charlie Brown is quietly looking inquisitive. And in the third frame, he says, "I thought cleanliness was next to Godliness." And in the final frame, Lucy responds, "What good is it to be clean if you're not on time!"

Hm.... cleanliness, timeliness, Godliness.... so many connotations and interpretations of those three words, eh? Cleanliness, timeliness, Godliness. As I've been pondering all of this in preparation for this morning, I've been thinking again about kronos time and kairos time. I know I spoke of these two "time commitments" recently, but in light of the events of this past week in our country, it seems timely to remind of them again.

"Kronos (chronos) is the ancient Greek word which refers to sequential or linear time.... We know kronos time as chronology; tick-tock time. It is measured, or chronicled, by clocks, hours, minutes and seconds.... We schedule our lives by it. Most people speak of never having enough of it as we race around the clock to make sure we maximize the time. Some even refer to much of life as 'putting in the time.'....

Kairos refers to the right time, opportune time or seasonable time. It cannot be measured. It is the perfect time, the qualitative time, the perfect moment, the 'now.' Kairos time brings transcending value to kronos time."^[1]

From one commentator who writes about both kinds of time, "Kairos is the right moment of opportunity which requires proactivity to achieve success. It is significant and decisive. These moments transcend kronos, stirring emotions and realities to cause decisive action. It is not an understatement to say that kairos moments alter destiny. To miscalculate kronos time is inconvenient [as in, "Gosh, I missed my appointment because I had the wrong time!"] To miscalculate kairos is lamentable."^[2] As in, "Gosh, we could have used this transition time -- kairos time -- to rediscover who we are as individuals, as a church family, as a nation, and what we have to offer to one another. But we are sometimes too focused on kronos time, just getting from Sunday to Sunday, from day to day, to reflect upon our kairos time together."

It's easy to get stuck in kronos time every day, isn't it? I have certainly fallen into that time trap over and over! And then I/we miss the kairos moments and seasons of life that could change everything for the better.

"In the New Testament, kairos time is mentioned eighty-five times, and thirty of these are by the apostle Paul.... The New Testament writers reflect the evolution of the word by referring to kairos time as the *present* moment, the *defining* moment, and even the *God-ordained* moments. Kairos is the time-frame for divine interaction and occurrences."^[3]

The four New Testament passages I read today use kairos as the word for time, not kronos.

From Mark, "The time [*kairos* time] is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

From Luke, "You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time [*kairos* time]?"

From Romans, "Besides this, you know what time [*kairos* time] it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; the night is far gone, the day is near."

And from 2 Corinthians, "For [Jesus] says, 'At an acceptable time I have listened to you, and on a day of salvation I have helped you.' See, now is the acceptable time [*kairos* time]; see, now is the day of salvation!"

So eighty-one more times in the New Testament the word kairos is used to denote time, not kronos. Kairos times are transcending times, holy times. What time is it here for us, in these most challenging times most of us have every experienced -- kairos time or kronos time? Or both?

From the same commentator I mentioned above, these helpful thoughts: "The span of time that measures a person's life is referred to as a lifetime. Each person has a limited span of time to live. Yet each person is given the opportunity to leave a legacy which is about contribution, significance, and things that really matter. Could there be two spans of time, whether recognized or not, which actually intersect?"^[4]

"Today decides tomorrow." So goes a saying on a stone at Chico State University which leads me to much *reflection* time. Charlie Brown and Lucy remind us that cleanliness, timeliness and Godliness are all important.... *Kairos* time is legacy leaving decision time.

Here's a few questions I'll leave with you for today -- What legacy do *each one of you* want to leave in our church, our community, our nation? What contribution do you want to make to ensure the strength and vibrancy of each one into the decades to come? We all have a role to play in the sacred future

here. What shall your role be in this kairos moment in all of our lives? Today does, indeed, decide tomorrow....

Let the people say, "Amen."

To hold in our prayers this day.....

And hold in your prayers all those affected by the coronavirus and the families of those who have died from the virus....

And all those families affected by the use of addictive drugs and alcohol among their members....

And all those who have worked tirelessly for the building and rebuilding of our nation into one people, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.....

And pray for our President that he might do the right things in his remaining days of being in office for the betterment and future of all of us.....

And add to our prayers, for Ron and Jan in Florida, both with covid, past colleague of Mimi's and his wife; "Cody," who doesn't live locally but needs prayers for guidance; and continued prayers for Hank Cary, Ed Lee, Ann Foster, Carol Moss, Fred Bagnall, Harriet Williams, Julie Pollitt, Zeke Bryant, Sally Harjula, Elliot, Trish Perry, Helmut Steger, John Flaherty, George Ng, Doug and BJ Thomson, Heather Van Buskirk, and Michael and Gail in southern Maine, *Please send me the names of those you would like for me to add to this list next Sunday AND those you would like for me to remove from this list.*

A Benediction

*May God bless you and keep you.
May God's face radiate upon you
and flood you with grace and tender mercies.
May God smile upon you always
and cover your life with peace.
Amen.*

Readings from the RCL (Revised Common Lectionary)

Sunday, January 17, 2021

1 Samuel 3:1-10 (11-20); Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18;
1 Corinthians 6:12-20; John 1:43-51

Words to ponder today about "time" and "decisions".....

“This is a new year. A new beginning. And things will change.” ~ Taylor Swift

“Time is a created thing. To say, ‘I don’t have time,’ is like saying, ‘I don’t want to.’”

~ Lao Tzu

“Openness, respect, integrity – these are principles that need to underpin pretty much every other decision that you make.” ~ Justin Trudeau

“Never cut a tree down in wintertime. Never make a negative decision in the low time. Never make your most important decisions when you are in your worst moods. Wait. Be patient. The storm will pass. The spring will come.” ~ Robert Schuller

^[1]Mark R. Freier, "Kairos, turning potential into reality," markfreier.files.wordpress.com, p. 2-3.

^[2]Ibid., p. 3.

^[3]Ibid., p. 4-5.

^[4]Ibid., p. 2.