

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

A few days ago I invited you, my readers, to let me know what “stands the test of time” for you. Here are a few of the answers I received: architecture – the keystone arch, flying buttress, etc., coupled with rhythm, harmony and balance, which actually may be the three most lasting elements in just about everything we do, hear, see.... classical music, words, art, our solar system, oceans, conception, and unfortunately, man’s inhumanity to man, the satisfaction I get out of creating something to give....

Rhythm, harmony and balance.... Can we keep those three elements in mind this week as the inauguration of a new President occurs while threats of violent conflict shroud our country now? We have to stay steady. We have to stay hopeful. We have to pray that those who would intend to do harm to those they think they hate would turn their energy in another direction. We have to remember we are all Americans, even though our intentions are more at odds with one another than they have been since the Civil War....

Bottom line.... Keep breathing. Keep hoping. Keep the faith. Keep what stands the test of time always before you -- in your mind and in your heart -- always, now and forever....

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 17, 2021  
as prepared by Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet  
Pastor of the Federated Church of Thomaston**

### **A Call to Worship**

“God of our forebears and our God,  
who has summoned women and men throughout the ages  
to be thy witnesses and sometimes martyrs for thee,

we bow before thee this day in remembrance and thanksgiving  
for the life and legacy of thy servant and martyr,  
the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.  
We thank thee for his time among us,  
for his words and for his deeds,  
and for the quality of his living witness which eases the pain  
of recalling the brevity of his years.  
We rejoice in his example of obedient faith  
and the scenes and stations of his life  
which inform and enrich our own faith journeys.  
And we beseech thee this day for the strength,  
steadfastness and courage not only to remember but also to obey.”

~ from a prayer by the Reverend Dr. Randolph Nugent,  
General Secretary, Board of Global Ministries, United Methodist Church

Let us worship this day in the light left on by MLK, Jr.  
Amen.

### **A prayer to ponder from Martin Luther King, Jr.....**

O Thou Eternal God, out of whose absolute power and infinite intelligence  
the whole universe has come into being,  
we humbly confess that we have not loved thee with our hearts, souls and minds,  
and we have not loved our neighbors as Christ loved us.  
We have all too often lived by our own selfish impulses rather than  
by the life of sacrificial love as revealed by Christ.  
We often give in order to receive.  
We love our friends and hate our enemies.  
We go the first mile but dare not travel the second.  
We forgive but dare not forget.  
And so as we look within ourselves,  
we are confronted with the appalling fact that the history of our lives  
is the history of an eternal revolt against you.  
But thou, O God, have mercy upon us.  
Forgive us for what we could have been but failed to be.  
Give us the intelligence to know your will.  
Give us the courage to do your will.  
Give us the devotion to love thy will.  
In the name and spirit of Jesus we pray.  
Amen.

**Readings of Scripture – John 1:43-51**

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Follow me.” Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth.” Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.” When Jesus saw Nathanael coming towards him, he said of him, “Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!” Nathanael asked him, “Where did you come to know me?” Jesus answered, “I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.” Nathanael replied, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” Jesus answered, “Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these. Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.”

**“I saw you under the fig tree....”**  
**A sermon based on John 1:43-51**

Will you pray with me. All knowing God, you see us and know us when we cannot see you and know you not at all. Surprise us with your attention. Help us to hear your call. Guide our actions and give us the words we need to answer you this day. Amen.

The Gospel of John invites us to focus our attention today on one of the “call stories” of the Bible. These are the stories in which ordinary people are called out of their very ordinary lives to become messengers of God, followers of God, and for those who would become Christians, followers of Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God. Call stories occur in the Hebrew Scriptures, the Old Testament to Christians, and in the New Testament.

Call stories are those stories that invited unsuspecting individuals to rise to occasions they never thought they could handle. Call stories continue and are told every day – from the calls some of us receive to go into ministry, to help to change the lives of those who are struggling in many ways, to speak out against injustice and bigotry, to run for public office, and yes, sometimes to do harm to others. We can be called to take up many causes – either good and noble ones, or destructive and deadly ones.

In the four Gospels of the New Testament, we learn of the individuals Jesus called to follow him – to do good.... to hear the voice of God ringing loudly in their ears and pounding in their hearts for the rest of their lives.... to accept him,

Jesus, as their human and divine leader. In the Gospel call stories, the disciples seem to just drop everything they're doing – fishing mostly – and leave their families without even a departing kiss to those they're leaving behind. Would you do that? I'm not sure I would....

In the Gospel call story we study today, the calling of Philip and Nathanael by Jesus to come and be his disciples has an unusual twist. Nathanael is skeptical of anything good coming out of Jesus' hometown of Nazareth. It's noteworthy that Nathanael *dismisses* Jesus' hometown with a tone of disdain and then.... then Jesus *compliments* his being “an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!” (John 1:47)

The words that jumped out at me when I read this passage this week were not “Follow me,” (John 1:43) or “Come and see,” (John 1:46), but Jesus' answer to Nathanael's question about how Jesus came to know him. Jesus says, “I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.” (John 1:48)

What do you suppose Jesus saw Nathanael doing under that fig tree? The passage gives no clue. The next verses simply relate Nathanael's epiphany experience of realizing just exactly who Jesus is – “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” (John 1:49) It's not Nathanael's exclamation that draws my attention, though, it's Jesus words to Nathanael, “I saw you under the fig tree....”

Here's my question for the day – what would Jesus see YOU doing under the fig tree? We don't know what Nathanael was doing. Jesus simply says he is “an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.” And apparently for that reason, Jesus calls him into faithful service, into a life of ministry.

In the King James Version of the Gospel of John, Jesus says of Nathanael, “Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!” (John 1:47) In the New International Version, Jesus says of Nathanael, “Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false.” (John 1:47) In the New Revised Standard Version which I read, Jesus says of Nathanael, “Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!” (John 1:47)

I like the translation in the New International Version better than the other two – it takes Nathanael beyond being a person who might be deceitful or tricky or crafty and speaks of his entire personhood. Here is a man of truth. And whatever it was he was doing under that fig tree, his truthfulness, his honor, his forthrightness as an Israelite stood out to Jesus.... even though Nathanael begins his comments about Jesus with disparaging words about where Jesus comes from! “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” (John 1:46)

There's a secondary lesson for us here, I think.... When we speak disparaging words about others, about groups of others, about those we might call our enemies, might we also find something of worth, of truth in them? Jesus did. He found truth in a man who had just dismissed him because of where he came from. What WAS Nathanael doing under that fig tree that led Jesus to believe he was a man of truth, "nothing false," (John 1:47) even though Nathanael spoke unkindly of Jesus' hometown? We'll never know what Nathanael was doing....

We're living in a time in which it is very hard to distinguish people of truth, people we can depend on in difficult times. Many of us have become very cynical about public officials or anyone who runs for public office. Many of us, in our various political persuasions, doubt the motivations of a variety of groups and individuals. It is becoming more and more difficult to find those individuals in whom we believe "there is nothing false." Where do we find integrity these days in our leaders, in our neighbors, in ourselves?

Are we the people whom Jesus might see under that proverbial fig tree and call, "Hey you, over there under the fig tree, come and follow me."

The most wonderful thing, the most encouraging thing, about the call stories of the Bible and about the epiphanies experienced by those who are called, is not that God and Jesus call people to be perfect, or to be perfectly sure about their faith, or even to be perfect servants of the faith.

We are only called to be people of truth, people without deceit, people without guile, people in whom there is nothing false.

Those of us who are *still questioning*, even as Nathanael and so many others in scripture questioned.... we are called just as surely as those who know right from the start that they are to live lives of faith and ministry. Nathanael was minding his own business when Jesus spotted him before Philip called out to him. I was 42 years old before Jesus checked to see what *I* was doing under that fig tree. What would Jesus see *YOU* doing under the fig tree?

Tomorrow we honor the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday. He was, and continues to be in his death, a light of justice and equality for all people in this dark time of injustice, inequality and meanspiritedness in our country. Dr. King was not a perfect human being, but/and he was called to serve, preach and proclaim a message of peace for all of us.

Jesus saw him under that proverbial fig tree and called him to serve God and each of us, no matter our color or station in life. What does Jesus see you doing, and call you to do, from under that fig tree?

Let the people say, "Amen."

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

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

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

**A**nd 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.....

**A**nd 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.....

**A**nd add to our prayers, **extended family members of Sandra Caron who all have the covid virus – Allie in Maryland, and Dan and his wife and stepson in Buffalo, NY; “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, .... **Mimi’s friends, Ron and Jan are both out of the hospital in Florida after having the covid virus.**

*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)**

**For Sunday, January 24, 2021**

Jonah 3:1-5, 10; Psalm 62:5-12; 1 Corinthians 7:29-31; Mark 1:14-20

## **Words to ponder today about “integrity”.....**

*“Integrity is a life where your beliefs and intentions are aligned with your words and actions.” ~ Stephen Lovegrove*

*“Integrity is doing the right thing, even when no one is watching.” ~ C. S. Lewis*

*“A true leader has the confidence to stand alone, the courage to make tough decisions, and the compassion to listen to the needs of others. He does not set out to be a leader, but becomes one by the equality of his actions and the integrity of his intent.” ~ Douglas MacArthur*

*“Integrity gives you real freedom because you have nothing to fear since you have nothing to hide.” ~ Zig Ziglar*

*“Whoever is careless with the truth in small matters cannot be trusted in important affairs.” ~ Albert Einstein*

*“Image is what people think we are. Integrity is what we really are.” ~ John C. Maxwell*

*“You can easily judge the character of a man by how he treats those who can do nothing for him.”  
~ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe*

*“The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.” ~ Martin Luther King, Jr.*