

“Sunday words” and a simple online worship service for February 6, 2022

Good Sunday midmorning from a cold, sunny, snow covered hill in Rockport.....

I’m thinking about passages this morning. I’ve reflected recently about the chapters and stages of our lives. Yesterday afternoon about one hundred people gathered in our sanctuary for the celebration of Muriel Pinkham’s ninety-three years of life chapters. So today I’m drawn to thinking about the passages that link, or bridge, those chapters of life for each of us....

According to my trusty iPhone Dictionary, there are nineteen definitions of the word “passage.” Who knew? I’m particularly thinking about definition #8 this morning – “an opening or entrance into, through, or out of something.” A passage can be instantaneous, as in the moment child is born and in the moment a person takes their last breath. A passage can be long and drawn out, as in the “rite of passage” moving us from childhood to adolescence or adolescence to adulthood.... And then there is the passage of extended illness or accident to the next “new normal” of this life or the final “eternal life.” It is all a mystery, yes? It’s probably good we don’t know ahead of time when or how these passages will.... come to pass.

And so, today I ask you to think about these passages that link your life chapters and stages – the events, the situations, perhaps even the words of another person that begin to move you from one place, one chapter, one stage to another. For me, the words of the person who spoke to me before I made the decision to go to Russia in 1994 were these, “Susan, you have to take this trip because it is going to change your life.” It did. The trip began the passage this person proclaimed for me from living a very secular, business oriented life to the life of ministry I’ve lead for over twenty years.

Speaking of Jesus, our text for today, Luke 5:1-11, tells the story of Jesus calling his first disciples to cast their nets for people and not fish. Those first ones dropped everything they knew to follow this fellow who could turn empty nets to overflowing ones. Their passage from humble fishermen to followers of Jesus beckons us to pay attention to the passages to come for us.

We are a people of chapters and stages and the passages connecting them. How do I know this? The Bible tells me so..... and rich conversations I had with Muriel over these past two years tied a bow around all of it for me. May she be at peace now, loyal servant, loving neighbor, model of good living for us all....

Blessings to all this cold snow laden first Sunday of February Susan

p.s. I will download this morning's scripture reading and sermon to the Federated Church of Thomaston Facebook page and my Facebook page freerangepastor later today for anyone who would like to tune in.....

p.s.s. As always, thank you to those of you who send me your e-mail responses to my writings. I don't always get a chance to write back to each one of you, but I appreciate all your responses! They keep me motivated to continue writing.....

**A simple online worship service for Sunday, February 6, 2022
as prepared by Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet
Pastor of the Federated Church of Thomaston**

A Call to Worship

Beckoning God, sometimes you take our breath away,
even when we are only gathering together on line, rather than "in the flesh"....

We find you with ones we did not expect.

You do what we would not have chosen.

Move our lives to join you on the edge,

Where holy love stretches out with grace.

Let us worship God, again across the airwaves this day.

Amen.

A Prayer for Today....

O Holy One, Jesus..... brother of us all.... being a Christian is risky business.

You ask of us to follow you, and sometimes we find ourselves standing on the edge.... afraid that we are going to fall over. But, you've been there before us. You have stood on the edge for what you believed and what you proclaimed. There is nothing that we are asked to bear or endure that you do not understand. You cannot promise us that everything will turn out the way we want it to, but you do promise us that you will stand with us at all the precipices of our lives as well as those times when we think we are on stable ground and have all the answers. But.... maybe we don't. Yes, being a Christian is risky business. Thank you for being on this journey with us.... and for leading and guiding us along the way. Amen.

Scripture reading for February 6, 2022 – Luke 5:1-11

On one occasion, while the crowd was pressing in on [Jesus] to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret, and he saw two boats by the lake, but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he asked him to put out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat. And when he had finished speaking,

he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." And Simon answered, "Master, we have worked all night but have caught nothing! **Yet if you say so**, I will let down the nets."

And when they had done this, they caught a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking. They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink.

But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man." For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish that they had taken, and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.

A sermon based on Luke 5:1-11

"Yet if you say so...."

Will you pray with me. Astonishing God, open our eyes to the miracles you perform each day -- no matter about empty nets, no matter about despair and exhaustion, no matter about our little faith. Help us to take courage and not be afraid to give it one more try, even when we think we can carry no more loads. Open our minds to new possibilities. Open our hearts to accept your love and your trust in us this day. Amen.

Our reading from the Gospel of Luke this morning records the calling of Jesus' first disciples to get into the boat of ministry with him and row out into the deepest waters of life to fish for people.

It always amazes me that even after almost twenty-two years of ministry, I read these stories of Jesus and each time something different catches my eye as I take in the words. I guess that's what makes the Bible the "living word of God" for me.

In this very familiar story of Jesus' calling of his first disciples, as Luke tells the story, the words that popped out at me this week were not the usual ones. They were not of Jesus' actions, or the miraculous catch of fish itself, or even Jesus' calling of his first disciples and his words of comfort and encouragements to them at the end of the passage.

The words that struck me this time come from Simon Peter's lips, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. **Yet if you say so**, I will let down the nets." (Lk 5:5) "Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets."

I'm not a fisherman, but I have to believe Simon Peter and his companions were feeling pretty discouraged. Fishing was their livelihood. No fish, no income. No fish, no food on the table for the family waiting back home. No fish, no future....

So Simon Peter's words to Jesus most likely came from a place deep down inside of him where worry and dejection and exhaustion live. Sound familiar? Lots of people now, in our time, in our country, are in that place -- where worry and dejection and exhaustion live. Simon and his fellow fishermen had been out all night -- no fish. They were probably tired beyond tired and sleepy, smelling of fish even without a catch in their nets -- eager to lay down and rest and forget it all until the next day, the next time they took their boats out in hopes of a good catch of fish.

Then Jesus sees them, gets into Simon's boat, does a little preaching to the folks along the shore, and says to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." (Lk 5:4) I have to wonder if Simon Peter might not have been mumbling under his breath, "You want me to do WHAT? We've been out all night. I'm tired, and wet, and hungry, and sleepy, and I smell like fish, and you want me to do WHAT?"

But instead of saying anything like that, he answers Jesus, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. **Yet if you say so**, I will let down the nets." (Lk 5:5) "Yet if you say so...."

Now Simon Peter might have been skeptical. He might have even been a little, or a lot, annoyed with this fellow Jesus. He might have just wanted to go home, have a bite to eat, and gone to bed. But he says to Jesus, "Yet if you say so...."

What led him to do that? What led him to take a chance with Jesus? What made him overcome exhaustion, frustration at catching no fish all night, and who knows what other difficulties might have been weighing him down that morning? Maybe what he was going to say to the wife and kids, coming home with no catch. "**Yet if you say so**, I will let down the nets." What led him to say and do that? If we were together I would ask your responses....

I don't know about you, but I've experienced a few times when I've done something, not because I had a particular plan of action in mind, or because I'd scheduled to do something, or because there was a particular reason. But "something" just told me I needed to do this thing, this activity, that was totally unplanned, unscheduled, unexpected, even unwanted, and amazing things

happened afterwards -- perhaps not as a *result* of my unexpected action, but after it, nonetheless.

I've mentioned before my going to Russia in 1994 for twelve days. The trip was one of those unexpected, unscheduled, even unwanted actions that lead to my leaving a financial planning career to go into ministry. The person who finally convinced me I needed to make the trip to Russia said words to me I'll never forget, "Susan, you have to take this trip because it is going to change your life." And it did. Had I not made that trip to Russia in 1994, I might never have begun seminary in 1995, and so I would never have been offering this sermon to you today.

Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." (Lk 5:4) And in responding to that command, with no good reason to do so other than it was JESUS who was asking, Simon's life was forever changed.

One commentator of our text for today writes, "Our reading for today tells the story of a 'seemingly insignificant encounter between two persons and opens up possibilities certainly not envisaged at the time by [Simon] Peter. It all begins with a risk on Jesus' part as [Simon] Peter could reject his initiative."^[1]

Acting on faith, acting in spite of all odds of fishing success, acting with no real hope of a good outcome, *both Jesus and Simon Peter take a chance in this encounter*. Simon Peter followed Jesus' instructions and in doing so had his eyes opened to a new reality, a new beginning, a new way of life before him. **"Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets."**

And what does Simon Peter do then, after the miraculous catch of fish happens? The text says, "He fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, 'Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!' For [Simon] and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken." (Lk 5:8-9) It seems that Simon remembered his initial lack of faith in Jesus' instruction and admitted his disbelief - perhaps as an act of remorse and regret and apology.

Then comes one of the best examples of Jesus' pastoral skills I know of. He says to weary but surprised and apologetic Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." (Lk 5:10) Jesus doesn't chastise Simon. He doesn't accuse him of being of little faith. He doesn't tell him his sins are forgiven. He simply says, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people."

I love Jesus, don't you? We always, always.... get a second chance, and then another, and then another, to get it right -- to believe, to trust, to love, to act, to be.... as Jesus would have it, as God would have it.

The simple, yet very challenging task, is allowing ourselves to be open to taking risks, to trusting that "something" -- that nudge, that intuition, that insight from a verse of scripture, or even an unexpectedly intense conversation with another person -- that gets us to do things for reasons we can't explain. When we do, who knows what might happen? A whole new world just might open up.

Let the people say, "Amen."

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

Especially today, we hold in prayer the family and friends of Kathleen's nephew, Heath, who died this week from cancer.....

Especially today, we continue to hold in prayer the family and many friends of Fred Bagnall who died on January 28.....

Especially today, we continue to hold in prayer the family and many friends of Muriel Pinkham who died in the very early morning hours of January 22....Dear Muriel, we love you..... rest in peace now and forever....

From our most recent bulletin and more....

Please 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 among their members....

And all those dealing with the ravages of cancer near and far.....

And all those affected, which should be every one of us, by the cruel condition of racism which continues to take the lives of too many of our Black brothers and sisters, as we approach Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

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 add a prayer for Tammy Whirly, a friend of Margie's, dealing with cancer challenges, and, from Jackie a request for prayers for Kyle Cloudier, continued prayers for Ursula recovering...and for "Cody," who doesn't live locally but needs prayers for guidance; Kristin Parker O'Neal, Jo Ann Parker's daughter, who has had brain surgery and is home now!; Enid, Ann Foster, Carol Moss, Julie Pollitt, Zeke Bryant, Helmut Steger, John Flaherty, BJ Thomson & family of Mimi's Uncle Doug, Heather Van Buskirk, and for Tiffany, Lucy's granddaughter.....

Please feel free to contact Susan by phone (207)322-1948 or by email at freerangepastor@gmail.com to have her add or drop any names from the

prayer list AND to let her know if you would like for her to stop by for a visit sometime. She's always glad to have a chat with you!

A Benediction

Go into this day with peace and love in your hearts.

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, February 13, 2022

Jeremiah 17:5-10; Psalm 1; 1 Corinthians 15:12-20; Luke 6:17-26

^[1]Howard K. Gregory, in *Feasting on the Word*, Year C, Volume 1. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009, p. 332.