

First, a correction to this morning's bulletin – if you scroll down you will see that I have noted on the front page that it is the First Sunday in Lent. That's not right. Today is Transfiguration Sunday in the Christian tradition. The First Sunday in Lent is NEXT Sunday, March 6<sup>th</sup>! I got ahead of myself this past week.... And isn't that true in so many ways? We move to the challenges and the worries of tomorrow rather than focusing on the challenges and worries of today. I certainly do. I too often tend to be a member of that club known as the "what if" club.... What if the roads are too slick tomorrow to drive. What if I can't finish my "to do" list this coming week? What if we don't have an Ash Wednesday service this coming Wednesday.... will some be disappointed? What if the authoritarian dictator on the other side of the world wins against the fighters for freedom in the Ukraine?

Living a "what if" life, in the negative, is not helpful. Can I/we turn that hour glass of "what if" negativity into an hour glass of "what if" in the positive? If the roads are too slick to drive, I won't. I'll stay home. If my "to do" list doesn't get done, is the sky going to fall? No. If the dictator on the other side of the world doesn't stop, the freedom fighters will fight harder and they will win with the help of the democratic nations of the world....

We are moving away from a time of having to deal with the dreaded and deadly scourge of covid. We have suddenly moved into a time none of us would have imagined ever needing to happen again after WW II – a time when the democracies of the world have to be defended against the dictatorships of the world. I'll list here two international organizations you could support financially if you choose to help the Ukrainian people with their humanitarian needs and the defense of their democracy. There are many other organizations helping, too. You can find them on line. Pick one. Send a check. Help.

You may send checks to:

International Rescue Committee, PO box 6068, Albert Lea, MN 56007-9847 OR

Global Ministries/UMCOR, PO Box 9068, New York, NY 10087-9068 RE: #982450

This Sunday is important in the Christian year because it's one of those bridges that link one Christian season to another in the epic story of Jesus' birth, life, death and resurrection. One of my liturgical, meaning worship, resources says this about Transfiguration Sunday: "The Sundays after Epiphany have explored various signs of Christ's manifestations of God. Today we focus on the awe and wonder of Christ's glory hidden from the eyes of the world, yet revealed to eyes of faith who know his suffering, death, and resurrection."

NEXT Sunday we begin the Christian season of Lent. I have made the decision that we will not have an Ash Wednesday service "in the flesh" this year. I will send out a post with a service you can practice at home this Wednesday, if you wish. And isn't that what Ash Wednesday is all about – going inward to explore the ashes to ashes life we all have to experience, no matter how much we would choose not to. The good news is, whether we are together in body or not, we are together in spirit always. How do I know that? Again, my answer is this – the Bible tells me so.....

Blessings to each one on this snow-covered morning on the coast of Maine.... Susan

p.s. The CDC has stated that masks are probably not necessary now. I will ask you to wear masks in church if you feel you would like to continue to try to protect yourself and those around you with this simple gesture.

## **“Transformed or Transfixed”**

### **A Sermon for the Federated Church of Thomaston**

**Thomaston, Maine**

**Sunday, February 27, 2022**

**Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet**

**Scripture: Luke 9:28-36**

Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah” – not knowing what he said. While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. Then from the cloud came a voice that said, “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!” When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen. Luke 9:28-36

Will you pray with me? God of all mystery and wonder, enlighten us with your wisdom and bless us with your presence as we seek to understand our place in your story in this fractious time we are living right now. Amen.

“And while [Jesus] was praying the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white.” (Luke 9:29) What an amazing and suggestive image that is! The appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white! The image makes me think of a Tide ad for the amazing power of a laundry detergent! “The clothes became dazzling white after they were washed with TIDE and the homemaker’s face changed!”

But really..... I have a hard time wrapping my mind around that picture of the transformation of Jesus’ presence witnessed by Peter, John and James. The transfiguration of Jesus, as it is called in scriptural terms, is described in one of the most significant passages of the Gospels. We don’t know whether the transfiguration describes a mysterious event or a vision during the ministry of

Jesus. It has been suggested that it may have been a post-resurrection appearance of Jesus that was placed back into his ministry before his death. It has even been suggested that the transfiguration story was entirely a creation of the early church to affirm the church's confession of Jesus as the exalted Lord. The historical origins of the story will never be known for sure. It is all part of the mystery of our faith as Christians, don't you know....

Jesus's disciples, Peter, John and James see Moses and Elijah speaking to him in his transformed state. "Peter says to Jesus, 'Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah' – not knowing what he said." (Luke 9:33)

God comes to Jesus, as his three amazed disciples look on, and says from a cloud, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" (Luke 9:35) Jesus is *transformed*. His disciples are *transfixed*. They want to hold on to what they have seen, to make it concrete, to build a memorial to it. Perhaps they think then all could come and see where Moses and Elijah appeared to talk with Jesus. They would then have "proof" of what they had seen and heard while they were "weighed down with sleep, but awake." (Luke 9:32)

Trying to show proof can be a dangerous and slippery matter.

How do we prove that we've seen something?

How do we prove that we've experienced the presence of God in our lives?"

Looking for proof can be a hindrance to truth because truth, speaking faithfully, cannot be nailed down. Nor can it be kept safe in a dwelling or a shrine. Nor can it be guaranteed, as a new appliance which comes with a one-year warranty, or a laundry soap that promises to get our clothes whiter than white, and brighter than bright.

Proof, guarantees, promises are hard to live up to. Security in our beliefs is hard to find. Helen Keller once said, "Security is only a superstition. It does not exist in nature. Life is either a daring adventure or nothing." The truth of scripture is like that. It is either a daring adventure in reading or it is nothing – a superstition.

The word for truth in Greek is "ah-lay-thia," which means "that which is not concealed." It is that which is there for all to see, if only we know how to look, if only we know how to experience what is right before us. We are often "weighed down with sleep," (Luke 9:32), though, like Jesus' disciples. We miss the clues of the truth of the gospel message that are forever before us. We miss the adventure of it by trying to nail it down, by trying to prove it. Sometimes we are even

blinded by it – to the point that we think we’ll never understand why events happen in our lives.

Truth is powerfully silent at times. The Gospel of John says to us that when Pontius Pilate, the Roman procurator, asks of Jesus just before his crucifixion, “What is truth?” (John 1:38), Jesus is powerfully silent. He stands there. He just stands there. He says nothing. In the story of Jesus’ transfiguration, the voice of God speaks from a cloud and says, “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!” When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And THEY [his disciples] kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.” (Luke 9:35-36) Truth is powerfully silent at times. It is hard to describe in words. It leaves us speechless.

I want to give you a visual aid. (blow bubbles) A child’s joy. A simple, perhaps meaningless act in some respects. But blowing bubbles is a good example of how difficult it is to describe something that we KNOW we’ve seen, but then it’s gone.

How do we tell someone about it? How do we tell them of the beauty of the colors of the bubbles, of the silent way they float through the air, of their perfect roundness? We can’t, really. Each one of us has to experience the reality of the bubbles in our own way, and come to know their truth, their reality, from our own perspectives.

We can’t construct a building to house them.

We can’t make them secure.

We can only remember them and watch for them again.

The truth of the transfiguration of Jesus is like that. The truth of God’s grace in each of our lives is like that. We can only remember when it happens, if we pay attention that is, and wait for it to show up again and again.

“And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white.” (Luke 9:29) Have YOU ever seen someone’s appearance change and observed that their whole demeanor and manor seemed to be different?

It happens when someone falls in love.

It happens when a new parent holds their child for the first time.

It happens when the STORY of Christ becomes the TRUTH of Christ in someone’s life.

Luke tells us it happened to Jesus in the presence of Moses and Elijah. The author of Exodus in our reading from the Hebrew Scriptures this morning tells us it happened to Moses in the presence of God. “Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God.” (Exodus 34:29) But Aaron and all the Israelites did, and “they were afraid to come near him.” (Exodus 34:30)

In the lectionary reading for this morning, which we didn't read, from 2 Corinthians 3:18-4:2, Paul reminds us that “all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.... [As] it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart.... By the open statement of the truth we commend ourselves to the conscience of everyone in the sight of God.” (2 Corinthians 3:18-4:2)

I blew bubbles a while ago, we saw them, they disappeared. We experience God in the arms of a beloved, with a child resting in our arms, when we see the sun rise every day. The beloved goes away or dies, the child grow up, the sun sets. They have all disappeared, but we remember them and watch for them again and again.

To FORGET them is to lose heart.

To become TRANSFIXED by them is to lose sight of God within them.

To REMEMBER them is to be transformed by their presence AND their disappearance.

We stand on the edge of the Lenten season today, a special time of preparation for Easter. It is, indeed, a time of transformation – a time for growing through repentance, fellowship, prayer, fasting, and concentration on our participation in the entire Paschal mystery of Christ's death and resurrection.

It is a time not to do something FOR God, not to build dwellings for Jesus and Moses and Elijah, but to be still and listen TO God and watch for all important bubbles in our midst – the shining lights that remind us that our faith cannot stand still and that we must not lose heart. Those lights cannot shine through just on Sunday morning. We need daily reminders that we are the signs of God's presence in this fractured world. Right now, we stand on the precipice of a dangerous time in our world due to the deadly attempt of a power grab by a dictator on the other side of the world.

The hard part for us is to realize that we are *participants* in the transfiguration event, not *spectators* to it. We are participants in the challenging

work of bringing to reality a world of peace and prosperity for everyone, not just for those who rant and rave and want it all for themselves and no one else....

It's very easy to come to church and be a spectator.

It's very easy to do the rituals of the season.

It's easy to say the words.

It's very easy to look the other way when waring goes on far from our borders, believing it is not our problem or our worry. But it is.....

Paul reminds us that we must "commend ourselves to the conscience of everyone in the sight of God" (2 Corinthians 18:38) through the truth we live, not just the rituals we do or the words we repeat.

"What is truth?" Pontius Pilate asks. (John 18:38)

It is the silence of Jesus standing before Pilate.

It is the memory of a bubble, shining in the sunlight.

It is the warmth of a beloved's arms around us.

It is the smile of a new parent.

Truth comes not in tranFIXation, but in transforFORMation "from one degree of glory to another." (2 Corinthians 3:18)

Truth comes not in trying to *hold* a bubble, but in *letting it go* and remembering its dazzling brightness.

Let the people say, "Amen."

**Federated Church in Thomaston**

**United Church of Christ    United Methodist Church**

**All Are Welcome**

**Sunday, February 27, 2022**

Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet, Pastor    Alice Billheimer, Organist/ Choir Director  
Lector: Richard Kortright

*Please be respectfully silent once our worship service has begun.*

*An asterisk (\*) indicates where you are invited to stand.*

***Bold print** indicates that the people speak these responses & prayers.*

**GATHERING FOR WORSHIP**

## **Welcome and Announcements**

**Prelude** This Holy Hour -- C. B. Lysberg, arr by George Blake

### **Call to Worship**

Pastor: Wherever we find ourselves, O God, may we remember that you are present.

**People: There is no place where we can run from your love, there is no place we can hide from you, there is no place where you will not find us, and love us, and hold us close.**

**All: May we experience and celebrate you in this time of worship. Let us worship God!**

**\*Opening Hymn** "I Sing the Almighty Power of God" 152 Blue Hymnal

**A Responsive Reading** Exodus 34:29-35 (see insert)

**A Moment of Silence**

## **SERVICE OF THE WORD**

**Scripture Reading** Luke 9:28-36

**\*Gloria Patri No. 70 Glory Be to the Father....**

**Message** "Transformed or Transfixed?" Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet

**\*Hymn of Meditation** "Let There Be Light" 440 Blue Hymnal

## **RESPONDING IN FAITH**

**Sharing Our Joys and Concerns with God and Each Other**

**Pastoral Prayer & The Lord's Prayer.....**

**Our Father 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.**

**Offertory** Theme from piano Sonata in A-flat -- Beethoven

**\*Doxology No. 95 Blue Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow....**

**\*Prayer of Dedication**

**\*Closing Hymn** "Where Charity and Love Prevail" 549 Blue Hymnal

**Benediction**

**Postlude** Variations on the Welsh hymn tune "Hyfrydol"

**Revised Common Lectionary Readings for Sunday, March 6, 2022**

**1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Lent**

**Deuteronomy 26:1-11; Psalm 91-2, 9-16; Romans 10:8b-13; Luke 4:1-13**

Especially today, we hold in prayer the family and friends of Kathleen’s nephew, Heath, who died two weeks ago 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....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 Whirty, 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](mailto: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!*

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Wednesday-3/2/22.....Ash Wednesday  
Thursday-3/3/22.....10:00 am – 2:00 pm: Quilters  
Sunday-3/6/22.....9:30 am: Worship Services

Suggested Food Pantry Donation.....Baked Beans

The flowers this week are donated by Nance Brown.

Deacon for March, 2022: Galo J. Hernandez III

Reminders for next Sunday, 3/6/22



Greeter/Usher: Laci DeVarney

Coffee

Host:

Zwick

wers:

Lector: Gerry

Flo

The 2022 weekly budgeted operating cost for the Church and parsonage is \$1623.00 per week.

**Federated Church of Thomaston  
United Church of Christ & United Methodist Church  
Together Since 1929**

***Sunday, February 27, 2022***

*“In a world so torn apart by rivalry, anger, and hatred,  
we have the privileged vocation to be living sign of a love  
that can bridge all divisions and heal all wounds.”*

*✍* Henri Nouwen