

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

Last Sunday I wrote about dreaming. This Sunday I'm thinking about March, which begins tomorrow. Have you caught it yet – that hint of the smell of early, early Spring-like weather in March that hits you when you step outside in the morning.... even though the ice rink still in our side yard challenges our two dogs and us, too. March is the month of cold rain in Maine, and mud, and more mud, and yet more mud. I've often said, "If there's a month to be out of Maine, it's March!" And yet, here I am, with Nance and two dogs, and no intention of leaving Maine *this* March. Sometimes it's important to stay where we are, to slog through whatever mud comes into our lives – be it on our boots, our cars' tires, our floors, or our spirits. We can't escape the mud of living, but/and we can learn something from getting through it....

So, here we are on the second Sunday in Lent.... The sun is shining, the air is last-day-of-February crisp, and Daylight Savings Time begins on March 14<sup>th</sup>, two weeks from today! What's not to give thanks for this day.....

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 first Sunday in Lent..... Susan

p.s. I will ATTEMPT, AGAIN, 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.... Lately downloading to Facebook has been a "hit or miss" affair! Margie tells me there may be a way to do this through Zoom..... I'm an "old dog," and new ways of doing things don't come easy for me. Anyone else have that problem????

**A simple online worship service for Sunday, February 28, 2021  
the second Sunday in Lent  
as prepared by Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet  
Pastor of the Federated Church of Thomaston**

### **A Call to Worship**

God of goodness and life, we gather in spirit, still not in body,

in the hope and beauty of this day.  
We gather to be further opened along the pathways of faith  
you set before us.  
Holy One, be our journey and our destination.  
Question our safe decisions, prod our imaginings,  
and walk boldly beside us into the unknown,  
yet promise filled future.  
Let us worship God, together in spirit if not in body this day.  
Amen.

### **A Meditation for the second Sunday in Lent**

“Along the Way”

Sometimes it is in becoming lost that I am truly found ...  
in the hour of darkness that I see God’s light;  
in being helpless that I seek God’s strength, a strength far greater than mine,  
in reaching a dangerous precipice that I discover important truths,  
in losing that I really win,  
in searching that I find,  
in the face of rejection, humiliation, pain, and unspeakable grief,  
that I find the true measure of God’s unconditional love  
and the blessing of God’s peace,  
in the depths of the loneliness from failure,  
from abandonment, from betrayal,  
I grasp the meaning of God’s word,  
when I finally dare to take that step of trust, and let God into my heart;  
into all the wounded places the world cannot see,  
when I dare to take refuge in the shelter of God’s care,  
when I dare to prepare God room,  
to live the journey of the faith that I profess....

by Sudha Khristmukti, freelance writer & member of The Methodist Church in India,  
appears in *Alive Now* for Nov./Dec. 2009

### **Readings of Scripture – Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16**

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said to him, “I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless. And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous.” Then Abram fell on his face; and God said to him, “As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the ancestor of a

multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you.”...

God said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall give rise to nations; kings of peoples shall come from her.”

### **“When Abram was ninety-nine years old....”**

#### **A sermon based on Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16**

Will you pray with me. God of holy surprises, remind us again this day that we are never too old to receive new knowledge, new insights into life and death, new ways to look into *your* crystal ball and see *our own* reflections. Amen.

Abram was OLD.... I mean REALLY old.... And Sarai was no “spring chicken” herself. This married couple had to be thinking more about which one of them was going to be left alone when the other one died.... than what they would name a new baby! Don’t you think? Our text from Genesis for today is full of surprises – not only for Abram and Sarai who would be renamed Abraham and Sarah and become the “ancestor[s] of a multitude of nations,” (Gen 17:3, 5)

This text is full of surprises for us, too, if we dare to bear witness to them. It reminds us that we can never know what’s in store for us down the road, or even tomorrow. And it tells us it’s never too late to begin anew, or start over in our lives, whether we be nineteen or ninety-nine....

Abram was OLD. Sarai was OLD. But their aged state didn’t make any difference to God. Age was not the issue.... faith was. And faith doesn’t have an age. All it needs is a warm body, no matter how many wrinkles that body has....

No matter if you’re rich or poor, or sick or in robust health....

No matter what your particular religious tradition might be, or no religious tradition at all....

Faith in life.... faith in the future.... is what counts, not age.... or economic status, or physical well-being, or what holy orders you follow or don’t follow.

Now this doesn’t mean that Abram and Sarai didn’t doubt the message God brought them. The text doesn’t tell us they exclaimed, “Oh joy! Isn’t parenthood going to be wonderful at our age?!” If you read on in this story you learn that Sarai laughed when God told her she was going to have a baby at the age of

ninety. God said, “You laughed.” And Sarai said, “No I didn’t.” And God responded, “YES, YOU DID!” (Gen 18:12-15), and left it at that.

It seems to me sometimes God leaves us sitting in our own soup of incredulousness or disbelief for a purpose. Maybe it’s just not time yet for us to see clearly what lies ahead. Read the Bible.... The human story of disbelief is told over and over again. People just don’t want to believe what’s going to happen to them and to those they love until waaay down the road.... Jesus’ first disciples, those twelve guys I mean, not the women, didn’t believe what was going to happen to *him* even as he himself was telling them what was going to happen.

We’re in the second week of Lent – that period of the Christian year when we are to look at ourselves and at one another and consider our own understandings of faith and doubt, of life and death, of today and tomorrow and still.... in the end, when Easter comes.... to remember there is always, always new life to be had....

But having faith there is always new life to be had doesn’t mean we don’t question sometimes or that we don’t have doubts, as Abram and Sarai demonstrate to us. Having faith doesn’t mean we aren’t incredulous when things happen that seem absolutely outlandish and beyond belief.

Faith comes with one big string attached. Sometimes you just gotta believe.... even when it seems impossible or ridiculous to believe.... even when all indications point to logical, rational, cynical disbelief and doubt that the current situation will ever get better.

In light of many things going on in the world right now –  
a deadly virus that has ravaged and killed millions of people since last February, and even with signs that the situation is getting better, Covid-19 is still a world wide menace,

when political wrangling and infighting in our own government seems way out of control,

when harsh and cruel and crude words are spoken and spread near and far through the media of the worldwide web,

when natural forces of snow and wind and water seem to suck the life right out of us....

when tragedy strikes a family completely unexpectedly....

in the midst of all these situations, and so many more, how are we to believe there isn’t anything too incredible, too impossible for God to accomplish? How are we to accept and affirm that there even is a God, a divine force, that really

gives a... hoot about any of us? Again, if we were together, I would ask for your answers.

My answer to that question has come to me in multiple ways over twenty-two years of ministry, but this week it appears to me in the outpouring of help that has come to a family in Camden who lost their home and one of their four children, a fourteen year old son, to a fierce and deadly fire. I don't know this family, but I know a number of people who do know them. And I noted this week on Facebook that Alex let people know on his Facebook feed how we could help this family. In times of crises, people reach out to help. We reach out to help even people we don't know. Some of us dropped off donations of food and staples to Boy Scout Troop 215 yesterday so they could deliver them to the local Thomaston Inter-Church Fellowship Food Pantry.

Whether you believe these are God ordained actions or not, they convince me that the human desire to help one another will always, in all ways, trump the human drive to sometimes behave selfishly and less than compassionately, less than lovingly to others.

I know it's corny, trite and overstated on bumper stickers that we must take life "one day at a time," but the truth of that statement is born out when the announcement is made that birth will take place at the age of almost one hundred for Abram and Sarai. The truth is born out when someone dies and others rise to the occasion to help out their loved ones.

One day at a time we move forward,  
some days doubtful,  
some days incredulous that anything good can happen again,  
some days going by through a blur of tears,  
but always, always remembering that nothing is impossible for God. For where only death seems to reside.... new life will spring forth. I believe that... for the Bible tells me so. 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 new President, and Congress, that they might do the right things in office for the betterment and future of all of us.....

And add to our prayers,

**Carrie Connors and the Hedstrom family of Camden as they deal with the aftermath of a fire that took their home and 14 year old Theodore Hedstrom, and deep prayers for Hank and Lucy as Hank pursues further cancer treatments,**

and a request from Mimi for Kendall, who is 49 and has hereditary neuropathy. It is progressing rapidly and at some point he will be in braces. Mike Sodano, who has had three-way bypass surgery this week, a friend of Mimi's and known to many in Thomaston, "Cody," who doesn't live locally but needs prayers for guidance; and Ed Lee, Enid, 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**

*Life is short, no matter the length of our days.  
We do not have much time to gladden the hearts of those  
who make the way with us.  
So be swift to love.  
Make haste to be kind.  
And may the creator of us all,  
the redeemer of us all,  
and the sustainer of us all  
be with you now and forever.  
Amen.*

(adapted from the words of Henri Frederic Amiel, 1821 – 1881,  
Swiss moral philosopher, poet & critic)

### **Readings from the RCL (Revised Common Lectionary)**

**For Sunday, March 7, 2021 – Third Sunday of Lent**

Exodus 20:1-17; Psalm 19; 1 Corinthians 1:18-25; John 2:13-22

**Words to ponder today about “faith”.....**

*“I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen; not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else.” ~ C. S. Lewis, 20<sup>th</sup> century theologian*

*“Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God.” ~ Corrie ten Boom, 20<sup>th</sup> century Dutch Christian watchmaker and writer who helped many Jewish families escape from the Nazis in World War II*

*“All I have seen teaches me to trust the Creator for all I have not seen.”  
~ Ralph Waldo Emerson*

*“To love means loving the unlovable. To forgive means pardoning the unpardonable. Faith means believing the unbelievable. Hope means hoping when everything seems hopeless.” ~ G. K. Chesterton, 19<sup>th</sup> & 20<sup>th</sup> century English writer, philosopher, and lay theologian*

*“And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.” ~ 1 Corinthians 13:13*