

Good nippy, sunny, first Sunday of Spring morning from a hill in Rockport.....

So, here we are on the fifth Sunday in Lent.... The sun is shining, the air is March crisp, the birds are singing, buds are beginning their Spring march into full bloom soon! What's not to give thanks for this day.....

I was reminded this morning of words of Rachel Carson from *Silent Spring*: "Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts. There is something infinitely healing in the repeated refrains of nature – the assurance that dawn comes after night, and spring after winter."

.... which leads me to the idea of "soul." You'll note at the end of this simple worship service that I've given some definitions of the word "soul." In our text from the Gospel of John for this morning, Jesus says, "Now my soul is troubled." (John 12:27) What does that statement mean to you? To me, soul is, as Carson writes, "the assurance that dawn comes after night, and spring after winter." Jesus says in the text from John, "NOW my soul is troubled." But LATER.... as sure as the dawn comes after the night, and spring after winter, our souls will find rest after the hours of the trials of life are over.... I believe that.... Do you?

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 fifth 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 to the Federated Church of Thomaston's Facebook page.... Finally, I believe I've found the solution to the problem of no transmission, with Shannon and Nance's help!

**A simple online worship service for Sunday, March 21, 2021
the fifth Sunday in Lent
as prepared by Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet
Pastor of the Federated Church of Thomaston**

A Call to Worship

People of God, we gather in this sacred space,

still not in body, in this sacred moment, but in spirit....
away from our daily concerns and restraints.
Here we recall the stories of faith.
Here we see the God who is constantly loving.
Here we are offered forgiveness again.
Here we remember whose we are.
Let us worship God!

A Prayer by Archbishop Oscar Romero *

No statement says all that should be said.
No prayer fully expresses our faith.
No confession brings perfection.
No pastoral visit brings wholeness.
No program accomplishes the church's mission.
No set of goals and objectives includes everything.
This is what we are about.
We plant the seeds that one day will grow.
We water the seeds already planted,
knowing that they hold future promise.
We lay foundations that will need further development.
We provide yeast that produces effects far beyond our capabilities.
We may never see the end results, but that is the difference
between the master builder and the worker.
We are workers, not master builders, ministers, not messiahs.
We are prophets of a future that is not our own.

* March 24th commemorates the life and witness of
El Salvadoran Archbishop Oscar Romero on behalf of the Salvadoran people.
On March 24, 1980, while he was saying mass, Archbishop Romero was shot and
killed.

Reading of Scripture – John 12:20-33

Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some
Greeks. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him,
“Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” Philip went and told Andrew, then Andrew and Philip
went and told Jesus. Jesus answered them, “**The hour has come** for the Son of Man
to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and

dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serve me, The Father will honor.

“Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say, -- ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, Glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.” Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

“The hour has come.... Now my soul is troubled”

A sermon based on John 12:20-33

Will you pray with me. Holy and human Jesus, teach us again from your living, your dying, and your rising. Remind us there are always two or more ways to interpret *your* life for *our* lives. Help us to choose the way that honors you and helps each of us to find peace within and without. Amen.

It’s countdown time in the Christian calendar.... Next Sunday is Palm Sunday, which marks the beginning of Holy Week.

Today is the fifth Sunday of Lent, the period of the Christian calendar when we are called to think about our errors and omissions of the past year, our misgivings and lack of givings, our *self*-centered lives versus our outward lives for the sake of *others*’ lives. It’s a time of deep reflection, if we choose to honor the process. It’s a time to say to ourselves, not “Why me?” in response to life’s challenges and difficulties, but “Why NOT me?”

It seems to me, Jesus is our best role model here. The Bible doesn’t suggest that Jesus ever said, “Why me?” It tells us that he said from the cross, according to the Gospel of Matthew, “*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*” (Matt 27:46) As a good Jew, Jesus called upon the opening verse of Psalm 22 in his greatest hour of need. “*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*”

Even in Jesus’ darkest hour, he wondered if God had forgotten him. Have you ever felt like God has forgotten you? I know I have. But again, I believe Jesus is our best role model. The Gospel of Luke tells us that he said in his greatest hour of trial, “*Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not MY will, but yours be done.*” (Lk 22:42)

But today, on this fifth Sunday of Lent, the anonymous writer of the Gospel of John calls us to sit with Jesus and hear him say, “*The hour has come...*” (Jn 12:23) The Gospel tells it this way, “*The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.*” (Jn 12:23)

You know.... I have to wonder if that’s *really* what Jesus would have said. Maybe it happened this way instead. Maybe Jesus said, “*The hour has come for me to suffer unbearable suffering, to have to hear the angry cries of ‘Crucify him! Crucify him!’ and then I will hang on a cross and die a horrible death. I didn’t ask for this! But the whole affair seems to have gotten out of hand and it’s out of my control.*” If I had been Jesus, I think that’s what I would have responded when people came in those final days of his life and said, “*We wish to see Jesus.*” (Jn 12:21)

In more “earthy” terms, I might have wanted to say under my breath.... if I had been Jesus.... “*What the hell is going on here? I came to show people how to live rightly with one another, and for that, they’re going to kill me. This makes no sense whatsoever!*”

The Gospel of John, as does the entire Bible really, gives us a beginning.... We need to fill in the rest of the story for ourselves. The Bible isn’t a *rule* book, it’s a *guide* book. If we don’t open it up for *our* time, it’s just another history book.... written two thousand and more years ago, filled with antiquated ideas, descriptions of too many horrors and killings, and too much suffering.... no different than many movies with extraordinary visual effects and sensational novels and TV shows of crime and punishment of today. But the Bible is more than that, isn’t it?

It’s a book about life.... all of its ups and downs, its immorality and goodness, its tragedies and triumphs, its falsehoods and great truths. One of my favorite passages in the New Testament comes when Pontius Pilate is questioning Jesus at the end of his ministry to determine whether he should be put to death or not, as the crowds want him to be punished. Pilate says to Jesus, “*What is truth?*”(Jn 18:38) and Jesus says.... nothing. He is silent.

What is truth? The truth of the matter of life is that “the hour” comes again and again. The hour of trial, the hour of losing one’s job and knowing you have a family to feed, the hour of terminal diagnosis, the hour of growing older and being told you can’t drive anymore, the hour of losing one’s mind and not knowing where it went, the hour of sitting by the bedside of a loved one and knowing *their* hour is almost up.

“The hour” comes again and again and again, doesn’t it? Jesus admits in the midst of it, whether we have the courage to do so or not, “*Now my soul is troubled.*” (Jn 12:27) “*Now my soul is troubled.*” What do you usually say when someone says to you, “Hi, how are you?” I know my response most of the time, “Fine. I’m fine! How are you?” But of late I’ve found myself thinking, if not saying out loud, “*Now my soul is troubled.*” Most people don’t want to hear that answer, though. They really don’t want, or have the time, to listen to the rest of the paragraphs that surround that answer.

Again, I believe Jesus is our best role model. If he can say, “My soul is troubled,” perhaps we can admit that, too. “My soul is troubled.” It’s like when someone apologizes to me for their tears, and I respond, “It’s o.k. ‘Jesus wept,’ too.” (Jn 11:35) As the story goes, he wept upon hearing that his dear friend Lazarus had died.

We weep when our loved ones die. We weep when our souls are troubled. We weep when we feel that “the hour has come” and the end is near.

We know how this story of Jesus ends as we work our way toward Holy Week and Good Friday and Easter. Why do we do this every year? Why do we have these annual rituals of Christian faith, of any faith tradition, really? Why do we repeat these stories every year when we know the end of the story? If we were together in body today, I’d ask for your answers....

I believe we repeat these rituals every year for three reasons:

First, we need to be reminded that WE are not the central character in the circle of creation. God, Higher Power, Holy Spirit – whatever you want to name that which is greater than we are – is the central source of life. We are *supporting* actors in the play, but not the *lead*. The rituals of our faith traditions remind us of that every year.

Second, we need to be reminded that there isn’t much new under the sun – only the old, old stories of family, relationship, human frailties and triumphs, power seeking and power losing, betrayals and betrothals, loves and lost loves. The centuries roll by and the human condition remains the same, no matter if the story is told in Genesis, or the Gospel of John.... or on the nightly news.

And third, I believe we need to be reminded that the role of religion is not to show us how to find a life of ease and comfort, or how to engage in the prosperity gospel of handsome TV evangelists. The role of religion, it seems to me, is to help us figure out how to get through all those times in life when “the hour has come” and our “souls are troubled.” The rituals of our faith traditions give us anchors to

hold on to, ways to navigate the rough waters of life.... a life *preserver*, if you will, as much as a life *enhancer*.

Jesus knew his hour had come.... and he was willing to admit that his soul was troubled about all of it. WE know about these times in life, and.... yes, we have a friend in Jesus who can help us get through them, if we just ask....

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 dealing with the ravages of cancer near and far.....

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,

from Blair a request for prayers for Lani, 42 with brain cancer and her mom, Judith....

deep prayers for Hank and Lucy as Hank endures his cancer journey with the help of Hospice at home now....

and prayers for Coretta and her family as they mourn the loss of Coretta's Aunt Ruth as she passed away unexpectedly in late February....

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 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 28, 2021 – Palm Sunday & Passion Sunday

Palm Sunday readings: Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29; Mark 11:1-11 or John 12:12-16

Passion Sunday readings: Isaiah 50:4-9a; Psalm 31:9-16; Philippians 2:5-11;
Mark 14:1-15:47

Words to ponder today about “soul”

A variety of definitions of “soul” from my iPhone Dictionary:

- ~ the principle of life, feeling, thought, and action in humans, regarded as a distinct entity separate from the body, and commonly held to be separable in existence from the body; the spiritual part of humans as distinct from the physical part
- ~ the spiritual part of humans regarded in its moral aspect, or as believed to survive death and be subject to happiness or misery in a life to come
- ~ the disembodied spirit of a deceased person
- ~ the emotional part of human nature; the seat of the feelings or sentiments
- ~ a human being; person
- ~ the animating principle the essential element or part of something
- ~ the inspirer or moving spirit of some action, movement, etc.
- ~ God; the divine source of all identity and individuality