

The birds are waking up. The sun will be coming up over Rockport harbor shortly. It's another day offering us the opportunity to do good, to be good, to live fully and in good relation with one another. And it's a day to be reminded of all the emotions of living – the good ones and the not-so-good ones – from our text for today's sermon – Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32. It's the story of the "prodigal son" – probably one of Jesus' most memorable parables. It's stunning importance in our lives comes from the fact that it covers all the emotions of life – love, hate, jealousy, pride, greed, misunderstanding, negative communication, and forgiveness – the giving of it all and the receiving of it all. The bottom line of this parable – grace – undeserved and available in never-ending ways. Would that grace and understanding begin to wash over each of us in ways we could accept and receive, no strings attached..... here, and around this chaotic and fractious world of ours.....

Blessings to each one this early Spring morn.... Join me in worship this morning, if you can, in person, or on line. I will tape the sermon and send it out via my Facebook page – freerangepastor, and the church's Facebook page – the Federated Church of Thomaston, later today. Susan

"this brother of yours was dead..."

A Sermon for the Federated Church of Thomaston

Thomaston, Maine

Sunday, March 27, 2022

Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet

Scripture: Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to [Jesus]. And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them."

So he told them this parable:.... "There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.' So he divided his property between them. A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger!' I will get up and go to my father, and I will say him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.'" So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. Then the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his slaves, 'quickly, bring out a robe – the best one – and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us

eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!’ And they began to celebrate.

“Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. He replied, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.’ Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. But he answered his father, ‘Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!’ Then the father said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because **this brother of yours was dead** and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.’” Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

Will you pray with me. Compassionate and forgiving God, parent of us all, welcome us home after we have strayed far from you. Bring us to our senses when jealousy and self-righteousness cause us to lash out and proclaim, “Life isn’t fair!” Help us to understand that grace and forgiveness are not commodities to be bought or earned, but gifts to be received and valued above all else. Amen.

“Love is a many *splendored* thing,” the song begins... but forgiveness... is a many *splintered* thing. Forgiveness is possibly the most difficult concept for us to understand or to accept in all the teachings of the Bible.

Has anybody ever done you wrong? Maybe it was in grade school, when your best friend in the whole world decided somebody else was more fun to play with than you were, even though you knew nobody could be a better friend than you...

Maybe it was in high school when the coach didn’t choose you to be on her team even though you knew you were the best field hockey player she could find...

Maybe it was in college when you didn’t get chosen for membership in the elite club you’d been dying to get into, even though you knew you would have been the best sorority sister or fraternity brother any club could have had...

Maybe it was in your first or second or third career, when you didn’t get the promotion you knew you deserved, and it went to some other person who always came in late to work and always left early...

Maybe it was in your marriage, or your former marriage, when you discovered your partner of many years had been having an affair for months, or

even years, and finally left you for the “younger more attractive or handsome lover”...

Maybe it was in your church family, when the friend you always thought would side with you in any conflict suddenly turned away from you to agree with those you didn't agree with about much of anything...

Maybe it was between you and a brother or a sister who always got whatever they wanted from your parents, and all you got was words implying, “Why can't you be as good, as bright, as pretty, or as strong as your brother or sister?”...

Let's face it, we've all had somebody “do us wrong” at one time or another in our lives... And the failure to give and receive forgiveness prevents many families, and friends, from ever getting over harsh words spoken long ago...

misdeeds that rip apart blood relations and lifelong friendships...

long standing hatreds and miscommunications that keep us from finding any good in another person once the breach has been committed.

Welcome to the season of Lent.... and the parable of the prodigal son! In Lent we are called to reflect about our sins, our misdeeds, our errors and our omissions. Then we are invited to turn over a new leaf... to begin again on a new page... with greater awareness of the power of choosing *spiritual aliveness and compassion over deadly disdain* for those whom we believe have done us wrong.

Perhaps the new leaf involves our determination to not do wrong again to another – to a friend, a partner, or a co-worker... to a fellow church member, or a brother or sister.

Lent is about raking away old, withered, damp leaves of human frailties and failures... and making room for new shoots of life and love and hope in our relationships with one another... and with God. Easy to say. Difficult to do.

In the parable of the prodigal son... we are called to reflect on the power of love and forgiveness... to bring a wayward son back into the family fold... and to offer to a dutiful son the awareness of grace, undeserved as well as deserved... and acceptance of sibling bonds and a father's love... stronger than any harsh words or errors of judgment.

Perhaps what makes this parable so powerful in its punch is, more than any of the other parables Jesus told, we're ALL in this one – at one time or another in our lives and in our relationships.

We've either "*been* done wrong," or "*done* wrong" to another and by golly, we are not going to get over it! We will not forgive... We will not ask for forgiveness... We will go to our graves with unresolved issues of wrong-doing and miscommunication... I have witnessed it time and time again in twenty-two years of pastoral ministry...

I truly believe that if we could hear and understand the words of the parable of the prodigal son... with open ears, open eyes, and most importantly open hearts... we'd all be a lot better off and a lot happier, too.

It's no secret. It's not hidden. The father in the parable of the prodigal son represents God, the God who goes above and beyond all human conventions to seek out the lost... to redeem those who have been wronged and done wrong... to offer new life to those who have become spiritually dead...

The father in this parable goes against all Jewish custom and law in his behavior. He bows and gives in to his younger son in giving him his inheritance before the father's death. This simply wasn't done in those days. In a patriarchal society, all authority goes to the father, the one not to be crossed, not to be ignored, not to be taken advantage of. This father sees his wayward son coming down the road, still far in the distance, and he picks up his robe and runs to him.

As Barbara Brown Taylor, one of my favorite preachers, says of him in her sermon on this parable, "He runs, he runs like a girl... to meet his lost son." Men of stature, men of authority, fathers... did NOT run in those days for any reason.

Before the son can say anything his father hugs and kisses him and doesn't even seem to want to hear his son's words of contrition. Such a public display of emotion would not have been acceptable, especially by a father, in those days. He moves right on to announcing there will be great celebration because this son of his who was dead was now alive again; he was lost and now found. (Lk 15:24)

But the elder brother was not thrilled about his younger brother's return... He was even less thrilled that a party was being thrown in his honor. The elder brother said to his father in so many words, "Father, you have done me wrong. This son of yours has done me wrong. I have been the good son, the loyal and dutiful son. And I have been done wrong!"

And the father's response, in so many words, "Dear, dear son, I have not done you wrong... I have simply done your younger brother right... as I have always done you right. He was lost and is now found, and so are you."

We know the details of this parable so well we often ignore their power and presence in our lives. All the emotional hot buttons of living in relation with one another come together in Jesus' teaching about the prodigal son.

Hear these words written in the early twentieth century. "How far you go in life depends on your being tender with the young, compassionate with the aged, sympathetic with the striving and tolerant of the weak and the strong. Because someday in life you will have been all of these."

These words of George Washington Carver, the African American scientist, botanist, educator and inventor, speak to the frailty and fitness of each of us to give rise to the goodness and grace of God for all of us. Once *we* were dead, but God forgives and renews us to new life each day.

Let the people say, "Amen."

Federated Church in Thomaston

United Church of Christ United Methodist Church

All Are Welcome

Sunday, March 27, 2022 – Fourth Sunday in Lent

Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet, Pastor Alice Billheimer, Organist/ Choir Director
Lector: Ron Anderson

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 The Quiet Garden -- Gilbert M. Martin

Pastor: Dear God, we come this day with questions and the freedom to explore many answers as we place our trust in your wisdom.

People: Dear God, give us courage this day to share your love with others, even when we doubt ourselves and them.

All: Let us worship the God who forgives, forgets and is forever with us!

***Opening Hymn** "Gather Us In" #2001 (Pew Sampler)

A Responsive Reading "A Meditation of the Heart" (see insert)

A Moment of Silence

SERVICE OF THE WORD

Scripture Reading Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

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

Message “this brother of yours was dead” Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet

***Hymn of Meditation** “Into My Heart” #2007 (Pew Sampler)

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 Now the Green Blade Riseth -- using a traditional French melody

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

***Prayer of Dedication**

***Closing Hymn** “The Summons” #2010 (Blue Hymnal)

Benediction

Postlude Forty Days and Forty Nights -- Lenten Hymn by George Hunt Smyttan

Revised Common Lectionary Readings for Sunday, April 3, 2022

Fifth Sunday in Lent

Isaiah 43:16-21; Psalm 126; Philippians 3:4b-14; John 12:1-8

Especially we continue to hold in prayer our Ukrainian brothers and sisters.... And we continue to hold in prayer the family and friends of Kathleen’s nephew, Heath, and also the family and friends of Fred Bagnall and Muriel Pinkham.

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 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

Sunday-4/3/22.....9:30 am: Communion Service10:30 am: Coffee Time

Suggested Food Pantry Donation.....Peanut Butter

Deacon for April, 2022: Sandra Caron

Reminders for next Sunday, 4/3/22

Greeter/Usher: Claudia Rosti and Richard Kortright
Gerry
Zwick

Coffee Host: Mimi and

Kathleen Anderson

Lector:
Flowers: **THERE WILL**

BE NO FLOWERS ON THE ALTAR DURING LENT

Collection Total for Sunday, March 20, 2022:

Pledges - \$535.00
Loose - \$154.00, \$150.00 of which is allocated equally to the memory of Fred, Muriel and Harriett
Total - \$689.00

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

Some reflections about forgiveness:

“Love is an act of endless forgiveness, a tender look which becomes a habit.”

~ Peter Ustinov

“I have always found that mercy bears richer fruit than strict justice.”

~ Abraham Lincoln

“[The one] who is devoid of the power to forgive, is devoid of the power of love.”

~Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.