

A very brief “Sunday words” for April 17, 2022, Easter!

Good Easter morning from a chilly, but almost sunny hill in Rockport!

About twenty hearty souls joined us for the Easter Sunrise Service at the Weymouth Cross in Thomaston this morning a 6 a.m. It was a fine gathering all around! As the geese flew over in formation, we began.... We sang, we prayed, we sermoned briefly (see below), we left to warm up in our cars, and we go into this day giving thanks for many things, spiritual and otherwise.....

I'll post the sermon from this morning's worship service in the church on line later this afternoon. And I'll record the sermon and send it out over my Facebook page – freerangepastor & the church's Facebook page – The Federated Church of Thomaston later today also.

I will be on vacation from tomorrow, April 18th until Monday, April 25th. Next Sunday, April 24th, Rev. Marti Garrison will be preaching! Thanks, Marti for gracing our pulpit at Federated! I'll also be taking a break from posting meditations this coming week.... It will be a time to refresh, relax and renew for just a bit, “the little gray cells,” as Belgian detective Hercule Poirot says, played by David Suchet in *Agatha Christie's Poirot!*....

I hope you will join me, if you can, in wearing masks when we sing this morning in 9:30 a.m. worship service..... Blessings to each one this Easter morn! Susan

**A reflection for an Easter Sunrise Service
at the Weymouth Cross, Thomaston, Maine
Sunday, April 17, 2022
By Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet**

So who got it right? Which of the stories of Jesus' resurrection is the “real” one? Mark 16:1-8; Matthew 28:1-10; Luke 24:1-12; or John 20:1-18. It IS an amazing story, no matter what version we read. And upon its meaning, Christianity has managed to stay alive for over 2,000 years. For this story, we share in the events of Holy Week.... We perhaps come to Sunrise Easter Services when we would be warmer and cozier staying home enjoying our coffee...

Who got it right? I believe they ALL got it right – because the story is too big to be told in just one version. The story is about the **triumph of life over death.**

The story is about the **power of sacred belief over the mistaken authority of human ignorance and doubt and hubris.**

The story is about **compassion and love overcoming hatred and prejudice.**

The story is about **Jesus' relationship with God.**

The story is about **our relationship with God with Jesus as our bridge.**

The story is about **the light.**

In the first paragraph of the Gospel of John, the writer says, "The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it." (John 1:5) Jesus came to shine in the darkness of humanity – that darkness that makes us do and say things that are not filled with compassion and love. Jesus showed the world while he was alive, through his death, and upon his rising that darkness can be overcome.

Who got it right? Every person who lives through and tells others about the amazing gifts of God's grace they have received through unexplainable events, unexpected conversations, and inconceivable compassion and kindness from others gets it right.

The details of the story may be different. The number of people in the story may not be the same. Angels may show up in the unlikeliest forms. But the ending of the story is the same. It is the beginning of faith – for all who choose to believe in the power of God in the world and out of this world through Jesus.

In life, Jesus gave us example.

In his death, hangs our despair.

In his rising, comes new hope.

Let the people say, "Amen."

Federated Church in Thomaston

United Church of Christ United Methodist Church

All Are Welcome

Sunday, April 17, 2022 – Easter

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 Fantasia on the hymn tune "Diademata" (Crown Him with many Crowns)

Pastor: It was dark. I preferred to stay where I was.

People: Dawn was close. The women beckoned us to come and see what had happened!

Pastor: Should I step out into the unknown?

People: Should we step out with grief in our souls, overcoming our fears, searching for the light of a new day?

All: Yes! We step out, we see that the tomb of death has been opened and that Jesus has risen. Alleluia! Christ has risen! Christ has risen indeed!

***Opening Hymn “The Day of Resurrection” #303 (Blue Hymnal)**

An Easter Prayer of the People (see insert)

A Moment of Silence

SERVICE OF THE WORD

Scripture Reading Luke 24:1-12

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

Message

“an idle tale”

A Sermon for the Federated Church of Thomaston

Thomaston, Maine

Sunday, April 17, 2022

Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet

Scripture: Luke 24:1-12

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, [the women] came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground.

The men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.”

Then they remembered [Jesus’] words, and returning to the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.

But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened. Luke 24:1-12

Pray with me. God of new and renewed life, turn our heads, tune our ears, touch our eyes that we might catch your shadow behind us, hear you loud and clear, and even see you in our midst this Easter Day. Remind us that yesterday, today and tomorrow we belong to you, and our charge is to never forget that sacred promise. Amen.

Let's think about this! Suppose you were one of Jesus' closest followers, who had been with him through thick and thin in the most difficult of times. Your friend and leader has just been killed mercilessly. You're in deep grief and wondering what you're going to do now. And suddenly these women come running to you to tell you that Jesus is not in the tomb where he had been laid after he died. They tell you that two men in dazzling white clothes have told them Jesus has risen from the grave. What would YOU have said to these women? (get responses)

I think my first response would have been, "Oh, don't be ridiculous! That's impossible!" And I might have thought to myself, "These women are overcome with grief. They don't know what they're saying. They need to get some rest." According to the story as it's told by Luke, these men seemed to think the women were telling them an **idle tale**.

Often it takes us a little while to get used to, or to make sense of what seems impossible, or what is too awful, or too good to be true. I know I can't speak for any of you, but for myself, many times things I read or hear seem "idle tales" – impossible, ridiculous, out of the question, beyond belief.

And you know what – it's true – the message of Easter – the stories of Jesus in his life, death and resurrection – are all ridiculous, out of the question, beyond belief and true. They're not true in the sense that each telling of the story of Jesus in the Gospels is full of accurate historical facts. That couldn't be because each of the Gospels tells the story in a different way. Different people are present – sometimes they appear as people, sometimes they appear as angels, heavenly beings. Different actions occur – in one Gospel telling of the story only one person goes to the tomb first, in another Gospel telling several go together.

I know that if after this service this morning, someone asked you to tell them about the Easter Service at the Federated Church, you'd each tell a slightly

different story. Some might say, “Oh, the flowers and the colors were beautiful!” Others might say, “Oh, the music! Alice’s playing was just amazing!” Others might say, “Susan preached a nice sermon!” And still maybe a few might say, “The Spirit was present from beginning to end.”

It’s that last one that matters – the Spirit was present from beginning to end. And in the Gospel tellings of Jesus’ resurrection to new life after his bodily death, the Spirit is present from beginning to end. It’s an “idle tale” only if we get stuck on the factual details of the story – who exactly said what, where, when.

It’s the greatest story ever told for those of us who have chosen to call ourselves Christians. It’s the greatest story because we have come to believe and understand that being a follower of Jesus doesn’t mean keeping score, or trying to determine whether Jesus’ body was stolen from his tomb or not.

Being a follower of Jesus means we understand and believe in Jesus’ words and actions before his death and after –

“Come, follow me.” (Matthew 4:9)

“Do not judge, or you too will be judged.” (Matthew 7:1)

“Come unto me, all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” (Matthew 11:28)

“Let the little children come unto me, and do not hinder them for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.” (Matthew 19:14)

“Love the Lord your God, with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.... and love your neighbor as yourself.” (Matthew 22:37-39)

“Do not be afraid.” (Matthew 28:10)

“Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.” (Luke 23:43)

And my favorite, “Peace be with you.” (John 20:19)

All of these words of Jesus, as they are relayed to us in the four Gospels, let us know Jesus lived – for God’s sake – and he keeps on living in each one of us, if only we let him in.... It is the story of Jesus in his life, death and resurrection that draws us here on Easter morning. I know some of you may also have been drawn here this morning because your parents or grandparents or perhaps great-grandparents wanted you to come with them to church today. And that’s a fine reason for coming, too. We hope you’ll come back another Sunday!

But we are all here today because of the FACT that “something happened” two thousand years ago that had never happened before and has never been forgotten – Jesus came into the world in human form like you and me. He healed the sick and preached to those who wanted to know of God and taught people how

they ought to treat one another. Then he died on a cross and the Gospels tell us he rose from the grave. For those of us who believe, he lives on as the Christ, our Messiah, our protector in holy form for all time.

What a gift we have been given in Easter, the celebration of Jesus' victory over death and our invitation to new life in the Spirit that hovers over us all. The story of Jesus' amazing disappearance from the tomb is no "idle tale." It is the story of new life, it is the story of Spring happening over and over – so we never forget that every Spring we have the opportunity to start over again, renewed, refreshed, reminded of who we are in the story of creation, in the story of Jesus' living and rising....

As a reminder of all of that this morning, I'm going to have some little colored Easter eggs passed out now. Don't open them until I tell you to! (have eggs passed out) Now I want you to open them and shout out what's on the little pieces of paper in each egg. (have people read their words)

Spring has sprung! Jesus has risen! Let us sing and give thanks for the glory of this day!

Let the people say, "Amen!"

***Hymn of Meditation** "Up From the Grave He Arose" #322 (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 Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee (Hymn to Joy) -- Beethoven

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

***Prayer of Dedication**

***Closing Hymn** "Christ the Lord Is Risen Today" #302 (Blue Hymnal)

Benediction

Postlude "Thine is the Glory, Risen, Conquering Son"--Based on a theme by George Frederick Handel

Revised Common Lectionary Readings for Sunday, April 24, 2022
Guest Preacher – Rev. Marti Garrison
Acts 5:27-32; Psalm 118:14-29 or Psalm 150; Revelation 1:4-8; John 20:19-31

Especially we continue to hold in prayer our Ukrainian brothers and sisters....

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, 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..... And for Arlene from NH.....

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-4/24/22.....9:30 am: Church Service10:30 am: Council Meeting
Suggested Food Pantry Donation.....Canned Soups

The flower arrangement on the alter this week is given in memory of Gretchen Alex from the Alex family.

Reminders for next Sunday, 4/24/22
Greeter/Usher: Claudia Rosti and Richard Kortright
Host:

Coffee

Lector: Dave Bilheimer
Flowers: Kay Sylvester

Collection Total for Sunday, April 10, 2022:

Pledges - \$916.00
Loose - \$ 55.00
Total - \$971.00

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

“On Christmas morning we find the manger full of life; on Easter morning we find the tomb empty of death. We know the whole truth now: death is not the end, and life as we know it is only the beginning of Life. There is no suffering from which we cannot rise if we live a life centered in Jesus.”

~ Sister Joan Chittister in *The Liturgical Year, the Spiraling Adventure of the Spiritual Life*

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

Sunday, April 17, 2022

*The answer must be, I think, that beauty and grace are performed
whether or not we will or sense them.
The least we can do is try to be there."*

~ Annie Dillard, in *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, 20th century

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