

“Sunday words” and a worship service for the Third Sunday of Easter, April 18, 2021.....

Good morning from a still slightly dark hill in Rockport.... But the birds have awakened as they do every morning!

One of my favorite quotes is by Rabindranath Tagore.... “Faith is the bird that feels the light and sings when the dawn is still dark.” Do you ever have that flash of insight that tell you all will be well, even when, at that very moment, things don’t feel well at all? I do. It doesn’t come often, but when it does, I do manage to suddenly become calm in the midst of chaos, or challenge, or worry.... Usually it’s worry about something I have to do, or a conversation I need to have with someone, tomorrow or next week or beyond and I’m “stewing” over it. Then I get this “feeling,” or it’s like someone taps me on the shoulder and says, “Susan, stop worrying. Tomorrow will take care of itself. Stay with today, that’s all you have to do.” I guess that’s a nutshell of a definition of faith, like Tagore’s definition of faith, with a twist.... What is faith to you?

In these weeks following the celebration of the resurrection of Jesus on Easter we are called to examine *what* we believe, *why* we believe it, and *how* we believe it. Think about that this week.... Let me know how you answer these what, why and how questions of faith. Perhaps I can share them, anonymously of course, in a coming sermon or “Spring Meditation.”

Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed! Blessings to each one this Third Sunday of Easter morning.... Susan

p.s. I’ll copy below the worship bulletin from this morning’s service and following it, the text from Luke we’ll consider this morning, and my sermon. I will post the text and my sermon on my Facebook page, [freerangepastor](https://www.facebook.com/freerangepastor), and on the church’s Facebook page, the Federated Church of Thomaston later today.... And my amazing webmaster, Phil, also posts these complete “Sunday words” on my website [www.freerangepastor.org](http://www.freerangepastor.org) under the sermon archives tab.

p.s.s.s. Let Alice or me know if you have suggestions for hymn choices or other music for our worship services.... We’ll do our best to meet your needs and desires....

**“Have you anything here to eat?”**  
**A Sermon for the Federated Church of Thomaston**  
**Thomaston, Maine**  
**Sunday, April 18, 2021**

**Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet**  
**Scripture: Luke 24:36b-48**

Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. He said to them, “Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?” They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate in their presence.

Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you – that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.” Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.”

Luke 24:36b-48

Will you pray with me. Compassionate God, you came to us in the flesh and bones of Jesus. Some of us believe that with all our being. Some want to believe it, but wonder if it could be true. Others do not believe it, no matter how many signs they see of Jesus’ work in the world today. Be with all of us in the coming moments, O God – believers, want-to-be believers and honest doubters of all kinds. Amen.

Have you ever changed your mind about something? Maybe it was a political issue – something you felt ought to be one way or was a certain way you thought, only to discover, suddenly or over time, that you were wrong. And so you changed your mind about that particular issue.

Maybe it was a life issue – something you thought you knew for sure when you were twenty-one, only to discover ten, or twenty, or thirty years later that what you thought when you were twenty-one simply was not true. And so you changed your mind about that particular issue.

Maybe it was a factual matter of some sort – “I know I left the car keys, or fob, laying on top of the dryer!” Then after an hour of searching you discover them in the pocket of the jacket you had on yesterday. And so you changed your mind about that particular issue.

Confession – I’ve changed my mind in all three of those situations. We change our minds about lots of things – important, relevant issues of life and death, and not-so-important issues like the location of our car keys.

The Gospels tell us that Jesus appeared after his crucifixion so that his disciples and others could believe that he had truly been raised from the grave, giving credence to all that the Scriptures had said about him before his death. Enough people changed their minds back then about God or we wouldn’t be gathered here this morning in a Christian sanctuary. Jesus gave them a new understanding of God.

We are here this morning because we either have a strong belief in, a question concerning, or maybe just a hint of curiosity about this man of flesh and bones who turned the world upside down by his very presence, both while he was alive and after he died.

Some of you here this morning have never changed your minds about Jesus, because you were born into an active Christian family that took its faith seriously and lived it out in worship and in service, just as Jesus commanded his first disciples.

Others of you have changed your minds – because you were only Christian “in name” for a part of your life and now you carry it further than “in name only.” Or, you changed your minds because you always considered yourselves “spiritual,” and were uncomfortable with the labels of religion, but now see it might be o.k. to say, “I’m a Christian.”

Others of you have changed your minds because of a life-changing event or series of occurrences that we call conversion experiences.

And still others of you would change your minds about Jesus, if only you could receive some sign.... If only something would happen that would give you proof that it was all true – what they wrote two thousand years ago about Jesus’ life and death and resurrection.

I fall somewhere between those second and third categories – for a while I was willing to say I might be a Christian, but I didn’t want to be associated with all those do-gooders and hypocritical church people I’d observed over the years. And then began the series of events that took place in my life, beginning when I was forty-two, that changed my life.... that made me change my mind about Jesus and who he was and who he is, for me.

I think so much about the people I care for – in my family and among my friends over the years – for whom Jesus is no big deal, who do not follow any

particular faith path and who seem to be struggling on one or more levels in their lives. I feel deeply for them, but I know, too, that I can't make someone believe in Jesus who doesn't want to, isn't ready to, or who resists any intrusion into their current way of thinking about faith.

We cannot change another person's mind. They have to change it for themselves. But *Jesus* did just that for the disciples. He changed their minds. He "opened their minds to understand the scriptures," and Luke tell us that he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things." (Luke 24:45-48)

But before Jesus opened their minds to understand the scriptures, he did something else. He loosened them up a bit. He engaged in what we often do to bring people together, and to get them to talk and to listen to one another. He ate with them. He said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" (Luke 24:41-43) What a great segue to fellowship!

At weddings and after funerals, in business meetings, at graduations and going away parties, at most church functions, at almost every function in Thomaston, people eat! We utilize food in many different capacities, and that is pretty much a world-wide phenomenon. When I was in Russia in 1994, my three American companions and I were treated to multiple banquets and rituals around food in our twelve days there.... and we drank a lot of vodka, always as part of the rituals of extending hospitality to these four American women who came to offer them new ideas about how to do community service using democratic principles!

Jesus utilized food in his ministry for several reasons – I'd like to think one of them was to loosen people up a bit – to help them get comfortable and to relax before he astounded them with his words. But he also used food to help them see that he was not a ghost. In Jesus' day, "angels or spiritual beings did not eat (see Genesis 18:8, 19:3, Judges 6:19-21 as examples.)"<sup>[1]</sup> So if he was a ghost they were seeing after his death, he would not be eating.

"In the Gospels, table fellowship is extremely important in working out God's realm. Jesus shared a table with a great number of people and crossed many cultural and religious rules in doing so. Round the table with tax collectors, prostitutes, and social outcasts, the realm of God was being acted out....

During the Last Supper before he died, Jesus told the disciples to remember him whenever they shared a meal together. After he rose from the dead, Jesus

continued to gather with his friends for meals, and in the eating they would recognize that Jesus really was with them still.”<sup>[2]</sup>

This is what we do in our communion service on the first Sunday of each month. And we HOPE to begin sharing in communion the first Sunday in May! We remember Jesus and what he did with the first disciples and we eat together while we remember. In the sharing of the bread and the juice we share with one another just as Jesus shared with his first disciples.

In some traditions, people are not invited to share in communion unless they are all of the same faith practice. In some churches, children do not participate in communion until they have received formal instruction so they can understand what it is they are doing. (tell story of person in Lincolnville who didn't think children should share in receiving communion) I'll share of my childhood experience around this another time. In this church, all are invited to the table – no matter their age, their instruction or their religious persuasion. To some that might not seem appropriate or right.

As your pastor, my reading and understanding of scriptures tell me that Jesus did not send anyone away from the table. It is an open table where all are welcome to share in the bounty of Christ. (tell story of Maggie in Lincolnville)

It is through flesh and food that we are real. It is through flesh and food that we know others are real. Jesus understood that fact and he used it well in his ministry. It has become one of the sacraments of the Christian church to partake of the holy meal with Christ in communion.

Jesus said to the disciples, “Touch and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.’ And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, ‘Have you anything here to eat?’ They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate in their presence.” (Luke 24:39-43)

Doubters who may continue to question; those who want to believe, but just can't quite yet; and those who believe with all their hearts, are welcome at Jesus' table in this time and place. Our task is not, I believe, to change the minds of others. Our task is to invite each one to supper and sit down together and say, “Peace be with you! Let's eat!”

Let the people say, “Amen!”

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[1] In *Seasons of the Spirit* for Lent, Easter, 2003, p. 86.

[2] *Ibid*, 88-89.