

Good morning from a quiet hill in Rockport, yet for the birds who sing beyond our windows....

Yes, it's Mother's Day! It's not a religious holiday, but one that has been recognized since the early 20th century in the United States. It's original inception came around the time of the Civil War of the mid 19th century and it stemmed not from a desire to send Mom flowers and fix her breakfast on her "special" day, but from a desire to recognize the role women had, and continue to have, in efforts to promote peace and well-being, and to honor the women in our lives who have been involved in those efforts.

To help us remember the original intention of the creation of Mother's Day, a few quotes....

"All that I am or ever hope to be, I owe to my angel mother." And "I remember my mother's prayers and they have always followed me. They have clung to me all my life." ~ Abraham Lincoln

"Most mothers are instinctive philosophers." ~ Harriet Beecher Stowe

"To describe my mother would be to write about a hurricane in its perfect power. Or the climbing, falling colors of a rainbow." ~ Maya Angelou

"The phrase 'working mother' is redundant." ~ Jane Sellman

"My mother was the most beautiful woman I ever saw. All I am I owe to my mother. I attribute my success in life to the moral, intellectual and physical education I received from her." ~ George Washington

"Biology is the least of what makes someone a mother." ~ Oprah Winfrey

May peace of the everlasting kind be with all our mothers, both those still living and beyond this life, no matter their triumphs or their trials, their strengths or their weaknesses.... They brought each of us into being and that is what matters....

Blessings to each one this early May morning..... Susan

p.s. I'll send out this morning's sermon via a Facebook post later this afternoon on my personal Facebook page – freerangepastor and on the church's Facebook page – the Federated Church of Thomaston.

“....and many believed....”
A Sermon for the Federated Church of Thomaston
Thomaston, Maine
Sunday, May 8, 2022
Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet
Scripture: Acts: 9:36-43

Now in Joppa there was a disciple whose name was Tabitha, which in Greek is Dorcas. She was devoted to good words and acts of charity. At that time she became ill and died. When they had washed her, they laid her in a room upstairs. Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, who heard that Peter was there, sent two men to him with the request, “Please come to us without delay.” So Peter go up and went with them; and when he arrived, they took him to the room upstairs. All the widows stood behind him, weeping and showing tunics and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was with them. Peter put all of them outside, and then he knelt down and prayed. He turned to the body and said, “Tabitha, get up.” Then she opened her eyes, and seeing Peter, she sat up. He gave her his hand and helped her up. Then calling the saints and widows, he showed her to be alive. This became known throughout Joppa, *and many believed* in the Lord. Meanwhile Peter stayed in Joppa for some time with a certain Simon, a tanner. Acts
9:36-43

Pray with me. Christ our teacher, you reach into our lives not through instruction, but story. Open our hearts to be attentive – that seeing, we may perceive; that hearing, we may understand; that understanding we may act in your name. Amen.

Once again the Revised Common Lectionary provides us with a text appropriate to the day – it’s Mother’s Day! How perfect that our reading from the Book of Acts tells us of another woman, a disciple of Jesus, who plays a central role in the story for the day!

Texts from the Book of Acts are always read in the weeks following Easter. These texts detail the first months and years after Jesus’ death. They tell of the successes and the challenges of the early church that sprang from the faithful efforts of Jesus’ followers after he was no longer among them to keep them from going astray.

The psalm reading for today is the 23rd Psalm, so well known and prayed so often at bedsides and in memorial services and graveside services. Jesus, the divine shepherd, no longer in the flesh, but only in the hearts and minds of his

followers, continues to lead, to tend, to give comfort, to give rise to new life in those thought to be dead, in spirit if not in body.

And so in our text for today detailing the death and rising of Tabitha, we are offered another dramatic telling of the power of faith and miracle. This time the miracle occurs to support those grieving the loss of a beloved woman, one who was apparently well known for her “good works and acts of charity.” (Acts 9:36)

Peter, the disciple of Jesus who comes to Joppa, was not what you would call the “model disciple.” Remember that he often missed Jesus’ point while Jesus was still alive. He denied that he ever knew Jesus three times in the hours before Jesus’ crucifixion. And last week we heard the text from John in which Jesus asks Peter three times if he loves him. Jesus doubts that Peter really understands what it means to love him. And then Jesus commissions Peter to take care of his followers by saying, “Feed my lambs.... Tend my sheep.... Feed my sheep.” (John 21:15, 16, 17)

The first half of the Book of Acts details the development of the early Christian church under Peter’s leadership, an impetuous but fiercely devoted follower of Jesus. And today, we learn of Peter tending to one of Jesus’ sheep, Tabitha, and those who loved her in life and who grieved over her death.

Peter tells all the widows to step outside of the room where Tabitha has been laid. He kneels down and prays. He turn to the lifeless body and says, “Tabitha, get up.” (Acts 9:40) She opens her eyes, sees Peter, and sits up. Peter helps her to her feet and summons all so they may see that she lives again. What a dramatic scene! It would make a believer out of me! Peter, errant disciple of Jesus, yet leader in the early church, once again lives out Jesus’ command to him, “Feed my lambs, tend my sheep, feed my sheep.”

Tabitha had made a difference in her community. She lived out her faith through her actions and her care for the widows in her midst. She was beloved. She died. Peter came to her bedside, her deathbed, and raised her to new life in the eyes of her friends, the widows who were her companions in the hard life of widowhood in those days.

So, all well and good you say. It’s another nice miracle story from the New Testament. It’s dramatic. But what does it have to do with us? What do you think? (get responses)

Theodore Parker Ferris, seminary professor and Episcopal priest of the mid twentieth century, once wrote, “A sermon is by nature a disclosure, an unveiling, a

revelation.... To preach is to draw the curtain aside from the figure of Christ and to lose oneself in the folds of it.” (from *Go Tell the People*, 1951)

In those folds, we both hide and reveal ourselves to one another in worship on Sunday mornings. In the miracle stories of new life told both before Jesus’ crucifixion and afterwards, we are lost in the folds of what it means to believe in something so far beyond our imagination that we can’t even begin to fathom its depth.

The two quotes that are on the front of your bulletins appeared last Sunday, too. Both are from the world-renowned scientist, Albert Einstein. “There remains something subtle, intangible and inexplicable. Veneration for this force beyond anything that we can comprehend is my religion.” And, “The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and all science.”

In the folds of the Christ curtain in which we find ourselves – we sometimes become lost. When a loved one dies, the grief that comes sometimes leads us to lose faith. The widows grieving Tabitha’s death may have been tempted to lose their faith. But then, they are found, pulling back the curtain to discover new life. As the text says, “and many believed...” (Acts 9:42)

The miracle stories of the Bible – are they for real or are they fantasies? Are they provable, beyond a doubt, to be historically, factually true? Or are they made up stories that have little relevance for us today? Or are they the meaning makers that affirm our belief that the Lord IS our shepherd? Each one of us has to answer those questions for ourselves. For me, I’m with Einstein. “The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious.” It’s the mystery of it all that draws me to the Bible, not the debate over whether it’s true in a historically accurate sense.

Maybe the bottom line of this text for today and for so many of the texts of the Bible is this – what do they invite us to do as we wander in the folds of God’s love – in our individual lives, in our life as a community of faith, in our relationships with all our brothers and sisters, no matter their religious leanings, or their color, or their ethnic background. What does Jesus call us to do this Mothers’ Day as we wander in those folds? How shall we live out this mysterious calling of faith that brings us to this sanctuary again and again?

Let the people say, “Amen.”

Federated Church in Thomaston

United Church of Christ United Methodist Church

All Are Welcome

Sunday, May 8, 2022 – Fourth Sunday of Easter

Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet, Pastor Alice Billheimer, Organist/ Choir Director
Lector: Sandra Caron

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 God So Loved the World -- John Stainer

Pastor: We come to worship you, O God! We are ready to be filled with your presence.

People: All honor and glory and blessings are yours, O God. We lift our hands and praise your name!

All: We answer your call to be present in your communities; to go beyond these walls, praising your name, sharing mercy, and witnessing to the transforming power of your love. Let us worship God!

***Opening Hymn** “All People That on Earth Do Dwell” (see insert)

A Prayer/Hymn “Each Breath is Borrowed Air” (see insert) by Rev. Dr. Tom Troeger

A Moment of Silence

SERVICE OF THE WORD

Scripture Reading Acts 9:36-43

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

Message “...and many believed...” Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet

***Hymn of Meditation** “God Made from One Blood” (see insert)

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 My Heart Ever Faithful -- J. S. Bach

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

***Prayer of Dedication**

***Closing Hymn "Christ Is Made the Sure Foundation" (see insert)**

Benediction

Postlude Trumpet Voluntary -- Henry Purcell

Revised Common Lectionary Readings for Sunday, May 15, 2022

Guest Preacher – Rev. Dick Hanks

Acts 11:1-18; Psalm 148; Revelation 21:1-6; John 13:31-35

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-5/15/22.....9:30

am: Worship

Service

.10:30 am: Coffee Hour

Suggested Food Pantry

Donation.....Baked Beans

The flower arrangement this week is given to Julie Law, Janet Dwelley’s Mother.

Deacons for May, 2022: Dave Billheimer and Doug

Schroeder

Reminders for next Sunday, May 15, 2022:

Greeter/Usher: Doug Schroeder and Kurt

Leidenroth

Coffee

Host: Blair Clement and Karen

Wincapaw

Lector: Arlene

Woodman

Flowers:

Collection Total for Sunday, May 1, 2022:

Pledges - \$4776.00

Loose - \$ 33.00

Deacon's Sunday - \$ 17.15

Total - \$4826.15

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

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