

“Sunday Words” for May 9, 2021

“Had any hummingbirds yet this year?” That’s what one fellow asked another in Maplewood Cemetery in Lincolnville yesterday as we waited to begin our graveside service for Sheryl Richards. The second fellow said, “Yep! Five of ‘em come yesterday!” This afternoon I’ll be getting out my hummingbird feeders, filling them with sugar-sweetened water (please don’t use honey!) and hanging them from our deck. And this morning I read a lovely piece about hummingbirds in a weekly blog post I receive called “Brain Pickings” by Maria Popova. She writes, “Essential as pollinators and essential as muses to poets, hummingbirds animate every indigenous spiritual mythology of their native habitats and are sold as wearable trinkets on Etsy, to be worn as symbols – of joy, of levity, of magic – by modern secular humans across every imaginable habitat on our improbable planet. There is, indeed, something almost magical to the creaturely reality of the hummingbird – something not supernatural but supranatural, hovering above the ordinary limits of what biology and physics conspire to render possible. As if the evolution of ordinary bird flight weren’t miracle enough.... the hummingbird, like no other bird among the thousands of known avia species, can fly backward and upside-down, and can hover.”

I think of those traits of the hummingbird as I ponder it being Mother’s Day today. Flying backward and upside-down, and hovering.... Isn’t that what a good mother does? Flying in whatever directions necessary to protect her little ones.... hovering over them when that’s exactly what they need.... “Essential as pollinators and essential as muses to poets,” hummingbirds remind me of the utter exquisiteness of nature and the perfect example they set for us of utility, purpose and grace.... on this early morn in May....

Blessings to each one this day.... Susan

p.s. I’ll copy below the worship bulletin from this morning’s service and following it, the text from the Gospel of John we’ll consider this morning, and my sermon. I will post the text and my sermon on my Facebook page, 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. 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....

**Federated Church in Thomaston**  
**United Church of Christ    United Methodist Church**

**All Are Welcome**  
**Sunday, May 9, 2021 – Sixth Sunday of Easter & Mother’s Day**  
Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet, Pastor Alice Billheimer, Organist/ Choir Director  
Lector: Doug Schroeder

*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**

Happy Mother’s Day to all of you who are mothers!  
Mimi and Gerry are with their family this weekend, celebrating Mother’s Day  
Nance is with her daughter and family in Shrewsbury, MA celebrating Mother’s Day  
Again today, please leave your offerings in the plates at the back  
and still we won’t have coffee hour for a while yet.....  
and please have your masks on when we are singing....

**Prelude** Prayerful Melody -- W. A. Mozart

### **Call to Worship**

Leader: O God, we open our mouths to praise you and you open our spirits to receive you.

**People: We open our minds to learn of your ways and you open our wills to follow you.**

**All: We open our hands to serve you and you open our hearts to love you. We are open to your mystery. Let us worship the God who opens us to new life this Mother’s Day!**

**\*Opening Hymn** “This Is the Day” (see insert)

### **An Invocation....**

#### **A Prayer of the People on Mother’s Day**

Living God, long ago, faithful women proclaimed the good news of Jesus’ resurrection,  
and the world was changed forever.

Teach us to keep faith with them, that our witness may be as bold,  
our love as deep, and our faith as true.

Creator of the universe, you made the world in beauty,  
and restore all things in glory through the holy sages of your birthing.

We pray that, wherever your image is still disfigured  
by poverty, sickness, selfishness, war or greed,  
the new creation in the name of Jesus Christ  
may appear in justice, love, and peace, to the glory of your name.

We pray as people of faith, of hope, and of love. Amen.

A Moment of Silence

**SERVICE OF THE WORD**

Scripture Reading John 15:9-17

\*Gloria Patri

Message “abide in my love.” Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet

\*Hymn of Meditation “Abide With Me” (see insert)

**RESPONDING IN FAITH5**

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  
(Offering plates are placed in the back of the sanctuary. Thank you!)

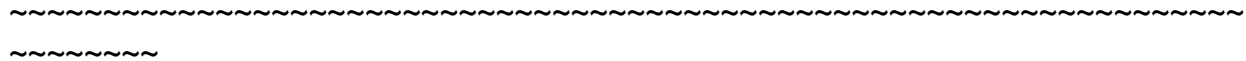
\*Doxology No. 95 Blue

\*Prayer of Dedication

\*Closing Hymn “Shall We Gather at the River” (see insert)

**Benediction**

Postlude Joyous Finale -- G. F. Handel



Revised Common Lectionary Readings for Sunday, May 16, 2021  
The 7th Sunday of Easter  
Acts 1:1-11, 15-17, 21-26; Psalm 1; 1 John 5:9-13; John 17:6-19

**PRAYER LIST**

Hold in your prayers all those affected by the corona virus 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 add a prayer for Tammy Whirly, a friend of Margie's, dealing with cancer challenges, and, from Blair, prayers for her friend Judith on the passing of her daughter, Lani, 42, from brain cancer, from Jackie a request for prayers for Kyle Cloudier, **and** continued deep prayers for Hank and Lucy as Hank endures his cancer journey with the help of Hospice and for "Cody," who doesn't live locally but needs prayers for guidance; Enid, Ann Foster, Carol Moss, Fred Bagnall, Harriet Williams, Julie Pollitt, Zeke Bryant, Sally Harjula Elliot, Trish Perry, Helmut Steger, John Flaherty, Doug and BJ Thomson, Heather Van Buskirk, and Michael and Gail in southern Maine

*Please feel free to contact Susan by phone (207)322-1948 or by email [freerangepastor@gmail.com](mailto:freerangepastor@gmail.com) to add or drop the names from the prayer list.*

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Monday-5/10/21.....6:30-8:00  
pm: Troop Meeting Tuesday-  
5/11/21.....4:00 -6:00  
pm: Weight Watchers Sunday-  
5/16/21.....9:30  
am: Worship Service  
.....After Worship  
Service: Council Meeting  
Suggested Food Pantry  
Donation.....Jello

The flowers this week are given by Muriel Pinkham in loving memory of all my loved ones who have gone before.

Reminders for next Sunday, 5/16/21  
Greeter/Usher: Doug Schroeder & Kurt  
Leidenroth  
Coffee  
Host:

Lector: Arlene

Woodman

Flowers: Larry Terrio

Collection Total for Sunday, May 2, 2021:

Pledges - \$2266.00  
Loose - \$ 14.00

Hall Rental -\$ 240.00 WW of Maine  
Total - \$2520.00

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

*Sixth Sunday of Easter*

**8 Hyler Street, Thomaston, Maine 04861 (207) 354-6105**  
FCT email is [thomfedchurch@gmail.com](mailto:thomfedchurch@gmail.com)  
WiFi password is #1Church

**“abide in my love” or “I choose you”  
A Sermon for the Federated Church of Thomaston  
Thomaston, Maine  
Sunday, May 9, 2021  
Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet  
Scripture: John 15:9-17**

“As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; **abide in my love**. If you keep my commandments, you will **abide in my love**, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and **abide in his love**. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends,

because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.”

John 15:9-17

Will you pray with me. God of love and light and ultimate friendship, remind us this day of the power and presumption of choice in our lives. Help us to remember that “to have a friend is to be one” is more than a trite phrase. Teach us yet again that “all we need is love,” even in the midst of our lives of confusion, conflict, chaos and too many choices. Amen.

The Gospel of John is not a rule book of the Christian religion. It is not a history book written to teach us about all the specific, accurate, minute details of Jesus’ actual life and death and resurrection. It is not the final factual word on who Jesus was while he was alive or the last will and testament of his presence then and now.

The Gospel of John is much more than all of that. The Gospel of John is a love story. It unfolds the love relationship between God and Jesus, and in turn the love relationship between Jesus and us, and comes back around to God’s love for each of us.

The Gospel of John doesn’t tell us how to be “good Christians” in our daily life. It doesn’t teach us how to separate Christians one from another, and from all others who do not identify themselves as Christians. It reminds us, again and again, that God is love, that Jesus is the living and dying radical image of God’s love on earth, and that we are loved – as friends of Jesus, as beloveds of God, even in the midst of all our unloveableness.

It is fitting that we read these verses from what has become known as the “Farewell Discourse” of the Gospel of John on Mother’s Day. For if there was ever a day to focus on love, it is Mother’s Day. For some of us, mothers are the epitome of goodness, our teachers of the ways we are to grow up in good relation

with others, our role models for compassion and generosity. That is certainly true of MY mother.

For others of us, mothers have offered only a few or none of those attributes. They were not the role models to be cherished and honored.... on Mother's Day. For some of them, it's their fathers who were their best role models for living.

And for still others, their parents simply were not nice people, not to be honored, never to be cherished. I didn't learn that until I went away to college in 1966 and some of the other girls in my freshman dorm spoke so hatefully or disdainfully of their parents. I was stunned! So for some folks, Mother's Day and Father's Day are not days to be full of celebrations for their parents, but days to try to forget how much their parents did not follow the rulebook of good parenting. So who to turn to for sustenance, for caring, for compassion, for love.... if not our parents?

Franciscan monk and prolific author of spiritual matters, Richard Rohr, writes of the motherhood of God in revealing ways. He says, "Most people (though not all) have experienced unconditional love not through the image of a man, but through the image of their mother. She therefore became the basis for many people's eventual God image, presuming it was a good God image. [Rohr admits] (I am convinced that many people sour on religion because the God they are presented with is actually less loving than their mother and/or father!) For much of the human race, [Rohr writes] the mother is the one who parts the veil for us. She gives us that experience of grounding, of intimacy, of tenderness, of safety that most of us hope for from God. However, many people also operate from a toxic and negative image of God. For those people, little that is wonderful is going to happen as long as that is true. Early growth in spirituality is often about healing that inner image, whether male-based or female-based.

[Rohr continues] Most of us know that God is beyond gender. When we look at the Book of Genesis, we see that the first thing God is looking for is quite simply 'images' by which to communicate who-God-is. Genesis 1:26-27 reads, 'Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every

creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.” So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.’

[Rohr goes on] God is not looking for servants, for slaves, or for people who are going to pass loyalty tests. God is just looking for images—‘images and likenesses’ of the Inner Mystery. Whoever God ‘is,’ is profoundly and essentially what it means to be male *and* female in perfect balance. We have to find and to trust the feminine face of God *and* the masculine face of God. Both are true and both are necessary for a full relationship with God. Up to now, we have strongly relied upon the presented masculine images while, in fact, our inner life was more drawn to our mother's energy. [Rohr concludes] That is much of our religious problem today.”<sup>[1]</sup>

The longer I’m in ministry, the more I’m convinced that most of the world’s problems, most of the disagreements between people stem from religious arguments, *misconceptions* of what it means to be loving people of faith, and downright *errors* in our understandings of what it means to live in right relation with God and with one another. If we could only bring the words of the Beatles song to light and life on a daily basis, “All we need is love.” Why can’t we do that? What do you think? (get responses)

I’m beginning to wonder if the answer to why we can’t seem to get along with one another in loving ways is we get our understanding of choices mixed up. I know I often say to people, “It’s your choice – whether you want to live this way or that way.” Or, “You have a choice to make about how you’re going to live your life.” But I think I’ve gotten it wrong. And Jesus’ words in our passage for today correct my error. He says, “You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name.” (Jn 9:16)

I think I had forgotten this crucial point about the Christian faith in all my desires to be independent and smart and rational. I had forgotten that I was chosen to follow this path, not the other way around. I thought I finally made the rational, intelligent decision to choose God and to specifically chose Jesus to be my bridge to God. But I got that wrong. I didn’t choose Jesus in May of 1990 when my father fell in the driveway and hit his head and died nine horrific months later. I didn’t choose Jesus on the morning my mother died in August of 1993. I didn’t



even choose Jesus when I made the decision to leave American Express in 1995 and come to seminary in Bangor, Maine.

Jesus chose me... long ago when I was five or six years old sitting next to my mother and father in a pew in Foundry United Methodist Church in Washington, D.C. Several of you know this story, and have asked me to share it on a Sunday morning. So, here it is. (tell my story)

And here, all along the way, or rather finally in my late 40's, I thought I chose Jesus. But the Gospel of John, the book of God's love come alive, hits me over the head each time I read our text for this morning, and reminds me that Jesus chose me, not the other way around, when I was a little girl sitting next to her parents in a pew in Foundry United Methodist Church in Washington, D.C.

Here's the question for the day: Did you choose Jesus, or did Jesus choose you? Let the people say, "Amen."

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<sup>[1]</sup>Adapted from *The Maternal Face of God* <sup>[1]</sup><sub>SEP</sub> (available in *On Transformation: Collected Talks, Volume 1* (CD), appears in Daily Meditation: The Maternal Face of God – May 13, 2012