

“Sunday Words” for May 16, 2021

Good morning from a semi-cloudy morning in Rockport!

I’m thinking about changes this morning.... changing seasons, changing times, changing tastes, life changing moments.... Change is probably one of the hardest parts of growing into adulthood, then experiencing all the changes we go through with each passing year, and then finally those dreaded “growing older” changes that begin to hit many of us in our 70’s and beyond!

Mostly, I don’t think we take easily to changes – except I like the changing seasons – especially when I noted this morning that our temperatures this coming week will be mostly in the 60’s during the daytime!

“The times they are a’changin’”.... goes the song.... and isn’t THAT the truth, as we move from complete isolation from one another over this past year, to beginning to stick our toes into some form of semi-normalcy now in our daily lives!

And changing tastes –

in clothes (I was forever convinced I would never wear pants that didn’t touch my shoes, and now they’re mid-calf sometimes. We used to call these “peddle pushers.” What DO we call them now? And I used to hate lime green and gold in my clothes, but now I love those colors!)

in our eating (I NEVER thought I would like Middle Eastern food, and now I’m cooking in our Moroccan tagine at least once a week, discovering I like honey and cinnamon and onions all mixed together, but NOT “preserved lemons”!)

in our faith practices, or not (I NEVER thought I would become an ordained minister standing in a pulpit delivering sermons! That still boggles my mind every Sunday, even though I’ve been doing it for twenty years now!)

And then those pesky life changing moments we don’t face with eagerness –

in the loss of our loved ones....

in the loss of our relationships....

in the surprise that the aches and pains of “growing older” are not just for those other people who look SO much older than we do.... I’d like to smack those medical advisors who continue to say to me one more time, “Well, for ‘a person your age’”

But change is a part of life we can’t deny, escape or refuse to admit. So we have to get with the program of change whether we want to or not. What good changes have come to you? What not-so-good changes have become blessings in disguise in

unexpected ways? What changes are you preparing for now, or dreading to prepare for?

Here's the good news I try to remind myself of every day – I'm not in this life boat alone, I'm in it with you. What life preservers shall we wear today, and tomorrow and into eternity? Let me know what yours are, and I'll tell you some of mine as we go along together into these uncharted waters and a change-filled future we cannot deny.....

Blessings to each one this Sunday morning.... Susan

p.s. I'll copy below the worship bulletin from this morning's service and following it, the text from the Book of Acts 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 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 16, 2021 – Seventh Sunday of Easter
Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet, Pastor Alice Billheimer, Organist/ Choir Director
Lector: Arlene Woodman

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

Next Sunday is Pentecost! Wear red!

Prelude Organ meditation on "Morning Has Broken"

Call to Worship

Leader: The Lord be with you.

People: And also with you.

All: We lift up our hearts to God and give thanks for this day. Let us worship God!

***Opening Hymn** “Love Divine, All Loves Excelling” (see insert)

An Invocation....

Welcoming God, we invite you to hear our prayers, to listen to our singing, to forgive us for our errors and to love us in spite of ourselves. We begin again this morning in the name of the One and the many you have sent to show us the way to new life in you this day. Amen.

A Prayer of the People

(adapted from a prayer by Howard Thurman, appears in The United Methodist Hymnal)

**O Holy God, open unto us light for our darkness, courage for our fears,
hope for our despairs.**

**O loving God, open unto us wisdom for our confusions, forgiveness for our sins,
love for our hates.**

**O God of peace, open unto us peace for our turmoils, joy for our sorrows,
strength for our weaknesses.**

**O generous God, open our hearts to receive all your gifts this day.
Amen.**

A Moment of Silence

SERVICE OF THE WORD

Scripture Reading Acts 1:1-11

***Gloria Patri**

Message *Lord, is this the time....*” Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet

***Hymn of Meditation** “My Faith Looks Up the Thee” (see insert)

RESPONDING IN FAITH5

Sharing Our Joys and Concerns with God and Each Other –

I had a good visit with Ann Foster and Enid Dana this past week in Quarry Hill, and hope to see Fred Bagnall in Windward Gardens this coming week!

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 Crown Him with Many Crowns -- using the hymn tune "Didademata"

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

***Doxology** No. 95 Blue

***Prayer of Dedication**

***Closing Hymn** “Be Thou My Vision” (see insert)

Benediction

Postlude Jupiter Theme from "The Planets Suite" by Gustav Holst

Revised Common Lectionary Readings for Sunday, May 23, 2021

The Day of Pentecost

Acts 2:1-21; Psalm 104:24-34, 35b; Romans 8:22-27; John 15:26-27, 16:4B-15

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 Whirty, 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 to add or drop the names from the prayer list.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Sunday-5/16/21.....10:30 am: Church Council Meeting

Monday-5/17/21.....6:30-8:00 pm: Troop Meeting

Tuesday-5/18/21.....4:00 -6:00 pm: Weight Watchers

Thursday-5/20/21.....11:00 am: FCW meeting and workshop (please bring your own lunch)

Sunday-5/23/21.....9:30 am: Worship Service

Suggested Food Pantry

Donation.....Peanut Butter

The flowers this week are given in loving memory of Nancy Terrio for her birthday on May 13th by Larry Terrio and family.

Reminders for next Sunday, 5/23/21

Greeter/Usher: Doug Schroeder & Kurt

Leidenroth

Coffee

Host:

Lector: Dave

Billheimer

Flo

wers: Frances Hernandez

Collection Total for Sunday, May 9, 2021:

Pledges - \$ 578.00

Loose - \$ 85.00

Total - \$ 663.00

The 2021 weekly budgeted operating cost for the Church and parsonage is \$1,623.00 per week.

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

Seventh Sunday of Easter

8 Hyler Street, Thomaston, Maine 04861 (207) 354-6105

FCT email is thomfedchurch@gmail.com
WiFi password is #1Church

“Lord, is this the time...?”
A Sermon for the Federated Church of Thomaston
Thomaston, Maine
Sunday, May 16, 2021
Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet
Scripture: Acts 1:1-11

In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. “This,” he said, “is what you have heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

So when they had come together, they asked [Jesus], “**Lord, is this the time** when you will restore the kingdom of Israel?” He replied, “It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all of Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

Will you pray with me. Wondrous God, you seem to come and go in our lives, yet in truth, it is *we* who come and go while you remain constant. Help us to envision Jesus going and then coming and then going again before the eyes of his baffled and clueless disciples. Help us to keep *our* eyes on Jesus, even when *we* feel baffled and clueless. Amen.

Time marches on.... Time stands still.... It’s about time!.... It’s the wrong time.... In the meantime.... At the same time.... It’s a good time.... Time to go!.... One more time!.... Father Time is creeping up on us!.... What time is it?.... And in our text from the Book of Acts today, Jesus’ disciples ask him the underlying question of all times, “Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom of Israel?” (Acts 1:7)

I delivered parts of this sermon to you via computer last year on May 24. We weren’t meeting in person for worship last May 24th. We were meeting on line, via the wonders of 21st century cyberspace. And yet, 2,000 years ago, Jesus’

disciples ask of him the question that has become for us, “Is this the time when we can get back to normal, when the pandemic is over, when people stop dying from the Covid virus? Is this the time when we can resume coffee hour, sing without masks, sit as close to one another as we want, and even hug one another, for goodness sake?”

Is this the time....? Time.... Some days it seems there’s never enough of it – to get everything done, I mean. Other days, time seems to stand still, when pain won’t go away, or when the longing for a loved one lost doesn’t seem to lessen, or when flights are delayed and we’re still thousands of miles away from home (that’s a memory for me, not a current occurrence!), or.... *is* this the time to let down our guard around the dangers of the covid virus when the daily local number of new covid cases in Knox County doesn’t seem to be going down.... even when mask mandates are being loosened around the country and masks are beginning to drop off the faces of many people.

“Lord, is this the time when we will get back to normal? We’re tired of waiting, O Lord. Make normalcy come again, can’t you?” Do we have the patience to wait for this “normal time” to come again, or are we impatient, like those first disciples of Jesus?

The disciples asked of the risen Jesus, who came back to haunt, I mean convince, them that he was on the move, but not gone, “Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom of Israel?” (Acts 1:7)] I have to believe Jesus was shaking a holy head and thinking under his breath, “Oh, Lord! Do they *still* not get it.... after all that’s happened, after all they and I have been through?! They’re still thinking in *chronos* time and I’m trying to tell them of *kairos* time. O.K., one more time.... I’ll try to get this through their thick heads.”

I’ve talked about chronos time and kairos time before. And now seems a very GOOD time to talk about them again – in the lingering months of this pandemic storm we have all been enduring for too long now! To review, there are two words for “time” in Greek. Chronos time is “watch time,” as in “Timex time,” or nowadays, “smart phone time.” For those first disciples of Jesus, they were thinking in chronos time – as in, “Jesus, when are you going to overthrow the Emperor and the Roman army and get in control here? When are you going to take over the world in chronos time?”

Kairos time is “watch time,” too, but as in “*God’s* time,” not Timex time or smart phone time. Jesus was trying to get the disciples to wrap their minds, and

hearts, around the reality of *God's* time, not the *Emperor's* time.... the kingdom of *God*, not the kingdom of the *Roman empire*. If you're on line, just google "chronos time versus kairos time," and you'll have a fine time discovering the difference between them!

Before church on Sunday mornings, I'm on chronos time. This happens for me on Sunday mornings whether I'm getting ready to post my "Sunday words" and service on line, as I was from last March until Easter this year, or when we are able to have "in church" worship! If you call me at 8:15 a.m. on Sunday morning and say, "Susan, I need to talk with you..." unless it's an emergency, I'm going to tell you we need to have this conversation another time because I have to finish getting ready for church!

But once we're *in church*, I'm on kairos time, and I believe my most important role from the pulpit is to invite *you* into kairos time, too.... God's time, not what time is lunch, or the ball game, or some other chronos time in the here and now, but what time are we going to acknowledge God in our midst, what time are we going to admit that chronos time may *seem* to govern our *days*, but *kairos* time governs our *lives*.

It's a curious thing, though, about kairos time.... because kairos time is also in the here and now, like chronos time. We just don't often pay attention to it because we're so busy, or frantic, or stuck in chronos time. "I've got to get my work done.... by Sunday morning, by Monday, by next week, by.... I don't have time to sit around thinking about kairos time, God's time!" I know when I find myself saying to myself, "I don't have time" for this or that or whatever, I try to remind myself that I have the same amount of time in each day as does everybody else. The choices we *all* have determine what we'll do with the time we have. What time do *you* have?

But here's the rub – especially now in this pandemic time.... we really don't have time to NOT think about kairos time. It seems to me one of the greatest challenges we have is not being able, or willing, to think in kairos time terms. The question the startled and frightened disciples ask of Jesus on his return engagement to earth, "Lord, is this the time...?" is possibly one of the most important questions asked in the entire Bible. "Lord is this the time....?"

Is this the time when human frailties and faults, human errors and omissions, human sins and missteps fall away?

Is this the time when God's gracious presence fills us all with compassion for others, with patience for ourselves and everyone around us, with love for our

neighbor, no matter who our neighbor might be, with acceptance for ourselves in the midst of all our human “stuff” that weighs us down, with the cloud of Covid still swirling around us in the local numbers of new cases each day?

Is this the time when we get over our chronos-time-selves and the mistaken notion that tries to convince us we don’t have enough TIME to get everything done!!! We’d *have* the time, if only we *took* the time to think about this, to pray about it, to live it, to love it.

Kairos time *beckons* us. Chronos time *holds us back*.... from acknowledging and living into God’s time, not our time that comes with all its stresses and stifling blocks.

But wait, there’s more! In our text for this morning, Jesus tells the disciples that they will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon them, and then they will be Jesus’ witnesses to the ends of the earth. (Acts 1:8) We don’t have to make this leap from chronos time to kairos time on our own. Help is on the way. Help is available right now, right here.

Can you feel it? Can you sense it in the people around you who live their faith day in and day out, whether they’re sitting next to you in church pews, or running into you at the grocery store? We have role models to follow. We have Holy Spirit galore sitting right here in our midst in this pandemic time. The question is.... the charge is.... the invitation is.... to follow the movements of the Spirit, wherever they may lead us, through whomever spreads those Spirit movements.

Henri Nouwen, “the world-renowned spiritual guide and counselor, who understood the spiritual life as a journey of faith and transformation that is deepened by accountability, community, and relationships,”^[1] wrote, “Spiritual formation is not about steps or stages on the way to perfection. It’s about the *movements* from the mind to the heart through prayer in its many forms that reunite us with God, each other, and our truest selves.”^[2] Nouwen’s words can help us experience *kairos time* in new ways, not just chronos time this summer.... As we have lived through this unprecedented time of “sheltering in place,” and have begun to return to more public venues in cautious and careful ways, can we hear the beckoning call of kairos time, not the stifling restrictions of chronos time?

You see, as Jesus’ first disciples came to experience the Holy Spirit in new ways, I do believe the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, works in many strange and wondrous ways even now. The Holy Spirit will show us the way into kairos time from

chronos time as we move forward, just as Jesus promised his first surprised and frightened disciples. The question is.... do *we* have the time, are we willing to *take the time*, to be open to seeing the road ahead of us in new ways, kairos ways along side of chronos ways?

Let the people say, in kairos and chronos time, “Amen.”

^[1]Henri Nouwen, with Michael J. Christensen and Rebecca J. Laird, *Spiritual Formation, Following the Movements of the Spirit*, New York: HarperOne, 2010, dust cover/book jacket.

^[2]*Ibid.*, p. xvi.