

Good morning from a sunny, cool hill in Rockport!

It's been a hard week, hasn't it? News of the violent deaths of nineteen children and two of their teachers in a classroom in Uvalde, Texas is too hard to believe, and yet we must somehow find ways to take it all in and go forward. Words seem close to useless. Prayers will not bring back these children or their teachers, just has been the case in the violent deaths of children in Sandy Hook Elementary School, of shoppers in a grocery store in Buffalo, New York, and in too many locations around our country. Is THIS the time, the tragedy, and the violent unprovoked use of guns in this moment in our country's history – as we celebrate and eat hot dogs on Memorial Day tomorrow – when things will change? Things must change. Protest. Stand up. Vote out public officials at all levels of government who refuse to stand up to the violent use of guns to kill innocent people.

As has been noted several times this week in Facebook posts, other countries are known for many things – “a cup of tea in England, a wheel of ripened brie in France, a short, squat olive tree in Greece.... a thermal spring in Japan, a highland fling in Scotland.... In America, it is a gun. These notes of what countries are known for come from the pen of Brian Bilston in his poem piece, “America Is a Gun.” As we remember lives lost in many battles tomorrow on Memorial Day, remember the families of nineteen children and two teachers who will not be celebrating tomorrow, but weeping....

Blessings to each one this sunny morning here on the coast of Maine..... Susan

**“We met a slave girl...”**  
**A Sermon for the Federated Church of Thomaston**  
**Thomaston, Maine**  
**Sunday, May 29, 2022**  
**Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet**  
**Scripture: Acts 16:16-34**

One day, as we were going to the place of prayer, we met a slave-girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners a great deal of money by fortune-telling. While she followed Paul and us, she would cry out, “These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you a way of salvation.” She kept doing this for many days. But Paul, very much annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, ‘I order you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.’ And it came out that very hour.

But when her owners saw that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the

authorities. When they had brought them before the magistrates, they said, “These men are disturbing our city; they are Jews and are advocating customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to adopt or observe.” The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates had them stripped of their clothing and ordered them to be beaten with rods. After they had given them a severe flogging, they threw them into prison and ordered the jailer to keep them securely. Following these instructions, he put them in the innermost cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was an earthquake, so violent that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone’s chains were unfastened. When the jailer woke up and saw the prison doors wide open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, since he supposed that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul shouted in a loud voice, “Do not harm yourself, for we are all here.” The jailer called for lights, and rushing in, he fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. Then he brought them outside and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” They answered, “Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.” They spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. At the same hour of the night he took them and washed their wounds; then he and his entire family were baptized without delay. He brought them up into the house and set food before them; and he and his entire household rejoiced that he had become a believer in God.

Acts 16:16-34

Will you pray with me. Freedom offering God, we come to you each Sunday with chains of all kinds holding us down – mental anguish for many reasons, physical pains and disease in our own bodies or those we love, prisons of spiritual unrest or doubt. Unlock the chains that bind us, O God. Show us new ways of considering and living through times of great difficulty and many questions. Amen.

Our text for today has all the makings for a blockbuster movie, or at least a mini-series on TV. The first segment could be about the unnamed slave girl and her powers of divination, or today we might label her either a person with clairvoyant visions or a person with severe mental illness who never received proper care and understanding.

We could witness the interchanges between her and Paul, who was so important and *driven* in his role as the first known champion of the Christian faith to those who were not Jewish, the Gentiles. The story tells us that he somehow missed the significance and the passion with which this young girl spoke

of *him* and of what he had to offer those who were wandering in their faith. She cried out, “These men are slaves [or servants] of the Most High God, who proclaim to you a way of salvation.” (Acts 16:17) But Paul became annoyed at her, and silenced her by ordering “the spirit” to come out of her. What was Paul afraid of in this innocent young girl’s words? (get responses)

We wonder, I wonder... what was she left with, once her spiritual powers were taken from her? Her masters surely were angry not only at Paul for shutting up their source of ill-gotten income, but at her, too. They probably made her life even more miserable than it already was... as a piece of property, a thing to be worked, in our time perhaps considered as an “illegal alien,” valuable for the cheap labor she could provide, but not valued as a person to be honored as a child of God or cared for in her poverty and mental illness.

The next segment of our TV mini-series could focus on the slave girl’s owners and all in that Roman center who wanted nothing better than a scapegoat or two to take the focus off their illicit and immoral activities, kind of like today in various political centers around the world – Paul and Silas would do just fine as their scapegoats. “Throw the bums into jail,” they chanted in so many words. And so that is what happened. Paul and Silas were stripped and beaten and thrown into prison... for what? Upsetting immoral and illegal apple carts that didn’t turn over easily then.... or now.

What causes mobs of people to do and to say what they wouldn’t have the guts to do or say one at a time, or in our day without the anonymity of a computer keyboard and a worldwide cyberspace network of fellow haters to support them?

We wonder, I wonder... what did they think about when the darkness of night settled in and they lay in their beds concocting their next angry, death-dealing deeds? What were they afraid of in the presence and words of Paul and Silas?

And the final segment of our TV mini-series could focus on the prison scene... First bringing into sharp image the jailer... whose task it was to keep Paul and Silas securely locked behind bars, so they could not create any more disturbance for those who believed Paul and Silas were a threat – a threat to their comfortable sense of hateful superiority.

Then the story brings into focus the other prisoners who were listening to Paul and Silas as they prayed and sang hymns. Would they have been amazed at these two men who seemed not angry, but joyful in their circumstance, shackled

and imprisoned unfairly? Or would they have thought these two must be crazy themselves, filled with demons who made them sing and pray?

And then the infamous earthquake happens, and “the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone’s chains were unfastened.” (Acts 16:26) Just imagine the sound and visual effects of the modern day TV, movie or computer screen when an earthquake happens in the story. Hollywood knows how to do this stuff dramatically and too realistically at times for my taste!

If you consider the number of times earthquakes bring amazing turnarounds in life and in death in the stories of the Bible, we might wonder about the number of earthquakes the world is experiencing now and ponder what that might mean in the greater scheme of things.

In our story from Acts, the jailer runs in, sees that Paul and Silas have been unchained and thinks he needs to kill himself or be killed when his magistrates find out he hasn’t done his job. But Paul shouts in a loud voice, “Do not harm yourself, for we are all here.”

The jailer calls for lights, [an interesting note since there obviously was no electricity in those days and surely the earthquake would have caused all the candles and torches to have been lost, but nonetheless] the jailer calls for lights, and rushing in, falls down trembling before Paul and Silas. He brings them outside and says, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:27-30)

What a scene! Earthquake and fear, the thought of death and destruction bring one face to face with God and the bottom line question of life, “What must I do to be saved?” Saved from what? Losing one’s job? Losing one’s family? Losing one’s honor? Losing one’s health? Losing one’s life?

Paul and Silas answered the jailer, “Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.” (Acts 16:31) In our day, there are many who identify themselves as Christians who truly believe that unless a person accepts Jesus Christ as their personal savior they will not be saved from their demons and they will not go on to be with God when they die.

It is a particular understanding of the Christian faith that has drawn many to it – often in fear and trembling... and many away from it – in disgust and disbelief. I fell into the latter category for the first half of my life. I simply couldn’t believe in a God who would sanction the idea that some are “in” favor before God and some are “out” of favor before God.

One of the things that led me into becoming a Christian comes from the work of one of the founders of the United Methodist tradition, the 18<sup>th</sup> century theologian and hymn writer, John Wesley. Wesley drew on scripture, church tradition, reason, and experience as sources in Christian discernment. It's known as the 'Methodist quadrilateral'. Drawing on these four sources I have come to believe that the Holy One is free to relate to us by unlimited paths.

And so it is stories from scripture, like the one we are considering today, that drew me into the Christian mystery. And reason and experience, my own and that of our sacred experiences, drew me in, too. It wasn't so much church tradition that drew me in.

So the trailer for our TV mini series could be stated like this: Paul and his companions meet a slave girl... an earthquake of the holy is unloosed... and heaven opens to those who would choose to believe in a just and all-encompassing compassionate God.

It's a great and compelling story. It offers us a way to enter into our current situation –

one in which there is too much death-dealing violence of the gun wielding and angry word kind,

too many individuals who use their political power to attempt to hold others down, and

too little faith in the Holy Spirit of God to bring things aright in our individual and communal lives.

In this story, Paul and Silas stand up to the powers that be and find converts to the way of Jesus in the midst of mayhem and earthquake, doom and gloom. Can we buy the story? I believe we must.... For the sake of our children and for our own sakes, we simply cannot let doom and gloom win.

Let the people say, "Amen."

**Federated Church of Thomaston**

**United Church of Christ    United Methodist Church**

**All Are Welcome**

**Sunday, May 29, 2022 – Seventh Sunday of Easter**

Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet, Pastor      Alice Billheimer, Organist/ Choir Director  
Lector: Jackie Harjula

*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** Prayer --by Beethoven

### **Call to Worship:**

Pastor: God of all nations and peoples, may our gathering in your name this day be marked with the wideness of your embrace,

**People: with the welcome of your love, and with our eager receptiveness to your ways.**

**All: Send your Holy Spirit to flow among us as a life-giving river, granting us and all creation your peace. Let us worship God!**

\*Opening Hymn "America" 697 Blue Hymnal

A Litany of Remembrance (see insert)

A Moment of Silence....

## **SERVICE OF THE WORD**

**Scripture Reading Acts 16:16-34**

\*Gloria Patri No. 338 Red

**Message "We met a slave girl...."**

**Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet**

\*Hymn of Meditation "How Great Thou Art" 77 Blue Hymnal

## **RESPONDING IN FAITH**

**Sharing Our Joys and Concerns With God and Each Other**

**Pastoral Prayer followed by 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** Hymn for Brotherhood ("In Christ there is no East or West")

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

**\*Prayer of Dedication**

**\*Closing Hymn "America the Beautiful" 696 Blue Hymnal**

### **Benediction**

**Postlude** Praise him on the Trumpet! -- by Jeremiah Clarke

*"Remembering and honoring the dead has been a part of the human experience from ancient times. Our Memorial Day holiday honoring those who have died while in military service offers a different opportunity for remembrance. Memorial Day was first proposed in the 1860's as a national day of remembrance for those who died in the Civil War. By the end of World War I, the holiday had expanded to honor all who had died fighting in any war. Nationally, we celebrate this day on the last Monday of May." ~ Mary J. Scifres in Just in Time! Special Services*

### **Revised Common Lectionary Readings for Sunday, June 5, 2022**

**PENTECOST – wear red!**

**Acts 2:1-21; Psalm 104:24-34, 35b; Romans 8:14-17; John 14:8-17, (25-27)**

### **PRAYER LIST**

**Especially we continue to hold in prayer our Ukrainian brothers and sisters & those who have lost loved ones in Buffalo, NY and Uvalde, Texas due to gun violence....**

**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, John**

Flaherty, BJ Thomson & family of Mimi's Uncle Doug, Heather Van Buskirk, and for Tiffany, Lucy's granddaughter, and for Arlene from NH, And Rev. Wayne Sawyer, And Mary Lou & family in their loss of Helmut....

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Sunday-6/5/22.....9:30 am: Communion  
Service .....10:30  
am: Coffee Hour

*Please feel free to contact Susan by phone (207) 322-1948 or by email at [freerangepastor@gmail.com](mailto:freerangepastor@gmail.com) to have her add or drop any names from the prayer list AND to let her know if you would like her to stop by for a visit sometime. She's always glad to have a chat with you!*

Suggested Food Pantry Donation..... Jello

Deacon for June, 2022: Mary Lou Steger

Reminders for next Sunday, June 5, 2022:

Greeter/Usher: Frances Hernandez  
Coffee Host: Kathleen Anderson  
Lector: Julie Brooks  
Flowers: Kathleen Anderson

Collection Total for Sunday, May 22, 2022  
Pledges - \$100.00  
Loose - \$186.00 of which \$50.00 is coffee hour proceeds.  
Total - \$286.00

The 2022 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**

**The Seventh Sunday of Easter**



**May 29, 2022**

**8 Hyler Street, Thomaston, Maine 04861 (207) 354-6105**  
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WiFi password is #1Church