

Good sunny Sunday morning from a hill in Rockport!

I was sitting in the bedroom early yesterday morning having my daily coffee and biscotti, before starting the day, and I happened to look out the window to see two sparrows on one of our suet feeders hanging from the railing of our deck. One sparrow was perched on the little box that encloses the suet. The other was perched on the edge of the tray that collects any pieces that drop from under the little box of suet. The one on the suet box took tiny pieces of suet and jumped down to the one sitting on the edge of the tray and fed it to him/her. This little feeding time occurred over a period of a few minutes. One bird retrieving the suet. The other bird receiving the suet. Hm.... Isn't that how it's supposed to go? Feeding and being fed. Isn't that what we are called to do with one another – feed and be fed?

But then, I happened to glance at the other suet feeder further on down the railing of the deck and I witnessed a bright red male cardinal battling it out with a catbird for the privilege of having a suet breakfast there! The cardinal won.... this round! Sometimes it's the other way around.... And isn't this also the way it goes with us? Fighting over sustenance and forgetting we are all in this feast of life together?

Today is Pentecost! That's the fiftieth day after Easter (the word Pentecost comes from the Greek word for fifty), when, according to the text for this morning, all the people from every nation were all together in one place.... and amazingly they were able to understand one another – even though they spoke many different languages! Isn't that how it's supposed to go? Doing our best to understand one another, no matter that we speak different languages?

Just today – on Pentecost – can we try to work harder, with more intention, to understand one another? I'll give it a try. Will you?

Blessings to each one on this Christian calendar day that reminds us of the birth of the Christian church so long ago on Pentecost.... Susan
p.s. I'll plan to post my sermon later today on my Facebook page – freerangepastor and on the Federated Church of Thomaston Facebook page. Enjoy this day, wherever you are....

“In the last days....”
A Sermon for the Federated Church of Thomaston
Thomaston, Maine
Sunday, June 5, 2022

Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet
Scripture: Acts 2:1-21

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs – in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine."

But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

'In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit
upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and
your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.
Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my
Spirit; and they shall prophesy.
And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below,
blood, and fire, and smoky mist.
The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of
the Lord's great and glorious day.
Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

Acts

2:1-21

Will you pray with me. Creator and creating God, this is the day we celebrate the birth of the Christian church. This is the day we are called to wonder with Jesus' first disciples and all others, "What does this mean?" Open our minds and ears and eyes and hearts to receive the wisdom you offer us through your Holy

Spirit – if only we pay attention and are willing to accept your presence among us this day. Amen.

This is another of those days in the liturgical (meaning Christian church year) calendar when the preacher’s challenge is how to make the text meaningful in a way that doesn’t just rubber stamp the story with the traditional interpretation we hear every year on the day of Pentecost –

the mighty winds ushering in God’s Holy Spirit in tongues of fire racing through the house and amazing every one,

the red attire we wear symbolizing those tongues of fire that the story tells us rested on all in the gathered community,

the strange foreign words of the Galilean followers of Jesus suddenly becoming understandable to people who didn’t know a word of Greek or Aramaic.

Peter’s speech can even be trivialized and interpreted so literally as to suggest the end really is near as he quotes the prophet Joel. As in, “So you’d better watch out and make sure you’re calling on the name of the Lord if you wanna get to heaven the next time ‘the end is near preachers’ come to town!

The story of Pentecost from the Book of Acts *is* often interpreted literally, leading people to ask questions of the text that aren’t particularly helpful. The skeptics in the story ask of the seemingly multilingual tongued folks, “Have they been hitting the bottle this morning?” So people often ask, “Is this story historically true? How can this be?”

M. Eugene Boring and Fred Craddock in their amazing commentary of the New Testament suggest this about the sources of the books of that Testament and their writing: “Many of these traditions may contain accurate historical memories of what actually happened, but *the primary purpose for which they were preserved was not to chronicle history, but to interpret the meaning of the faith.*

Both Luke’s *sources* [in the Books of Luke and Acts] and *his own narrative* belong to the category of *theologically interpreted history*.... Especially the evangelistic sermons of the early preachers [like Peter] are intended as *summaries of the Christian message and models of preaching for Luke’s own and later times.*”^[1]

The Book of Acts tells us the newly found Christian church started with about one hundred twenty people and grew to three thousand as soon as Peter finished his first sermon! Really? Where have I gone wrong in these past twenty-two years of preaching?

So our question of this text more meaningfully might be, not “did this really happen?”, but what does this story, this “theologically interpreted history” as Boring and Craddock call it, have to do with us? How does Peter’s summary of the Christian message correspond to *our understanding* of what the Christian message is about?

Is it possible today for there to be any true common ground between us, as there was in the story of the first Pentecost?

In our religious leanings, or in our state and country and world in which it seems there is little understanding between people who speak *the same* language, let alone those who *do not* speak the same language – is there any common ground? I don’t know about you, but some days I get discouraged and wonder if there ever will come a time when people will want to understand one another and respect one another’s differences.

As so often happens, I read a piece this last week that caused me to think differently about our text for this morning and what it might mean for us in 2022. This is from the pen of Bill Murphy, Jr., who writes for a website called Understandably.com. He begins, “I came across an academic study recently that seemed promising and exactly the sort of thing I’d like to write about here. It’s from the University of Pennsylvania, and it purports to show that American politics is driven more by sincere beliefs than by hatred of the other side..... [that idea aside this morning, further on down in his article he states] So I set [the university study aside], and I thought to myself: Now, the one thing we can all agree on, is.... Hmmmm. [He writes,] I started that sentence, and I stared at it for a while..... [and realized I couldn’t finish the thought [the one thing we can all agree on is....] He asks is there anything at all that we could agree on, 100 percent? How about 95 percent?”

He invited his readers to send him answers to the statement “Now, the one thing we can all agree on is.....” So far, he hasn’t written a follow up article to this one. I’m now following him on the Understandable.com website. I’ll let you know what he finds out from his readers.

For us, can you tell me one thing you believe we can all agree on? (get responses) I haven’t been able to come up with my response to his question. In this particular time in our lives, our situation nationally and globally, I can’t think of anything we can all agree on.... But then I remember..... there was Pentecost.... two thousand years ago.....

And on this day of Pentecost, two thousand years later, we are reminded of the importance of modeling behavior –
the behavior that demonstrates the *best of the best* of the Christian faith –
the *all inclusive call* to people of every nation, every tongue, every race to meet and converse in the language of God –
the *language of God* that surpasses all knowledge and trumps all our differences in doctrine, in action, in faith –
so we might truly begin to understand one another and agree on SOMETHING, if not everything.

That seems like a pipe dream too often, doesn't it?

With deadly violence erupting everywhere, with a deadly virus ripping us apart politically and socially, with racial inequalities in every community.... how are we ever going to become kindred spirits with the Holy Spirit and be able to easily complete the sentence "Now, the one thing we can all agree on is...."?

I don't have a good answer to that question. But I know this – throughout the Bible we read the story of how God has come near to humankind, strengthening and encouraging those who walk in God's ways. The Christian community began with an event, fifty days after Easter, celebrating God's Spirit, present with the people who then spread out through the world telling the good news of the ways of Jesus.

Would that it were that simple then or today. But we have to keep trying. The Book of Acts offers many details of how things went in the earliest church, before there was doctrine, before there were megachurches, before there were denominations all offering their own interpretations of what Jesus "REALLY meant."

If you've read the entire Book of Acts, and I suggest you do, you know that things did not always go smoothly in those first church committee meetings, coffee hours, and events for their communities. There was dissention. There were splits. There were disagreements about many aspects of church life and communal life beyond the church. Yet through it all, there was God's Holy Spirit reminding the people again and again of the reason for the existence of this new group of followers of those who would come to call themselves Christians. The reason was, and remains, Jesus – his ministry, his healings, his proclamations of the holy power of God in one's life, his willingness to lay down his life for the sake of others, his love for God and for all those he touched and touches now.

The Bible tells me two things – first and foremost, God is love, and as the prophet Joel proclaimed long ago, ‘*In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit **upon all flesh**, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.*’ (Acts 2:17)

Upon *all* flesh, in the last days, our *hope* for agreeing on one thing will come true. Each one of us shall meet our Creator in divine flesh for all time, no matter our language differences, or our politics, or the color of our skin, or the country we call home, or anything else we believe divides us now. In *that* time we will be “*all together in one place.*” (Acts 2:1)

Let the people say, “Amen.”

Federated Church of Thomaston
United Church of Christ United Methodist Church
All Are Welcome
Sunday, June 5, 2022 – Pentecost!

Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet, Pastor Alice Billheimer, Organist/ Choir Director
Lector: Julie Brooks

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 Christian, Follow Me (from the hymn tune "Galilee" or "Jesus Calls Us...")

Call to Worship:

Pastor: Fashion us, O God, with divine imagination! Mold us with sacred intention!

People: Charge us with your compassion! Transform us with joy, even in this tumultuous time!

All: Birth us again, anew. Live through us this day! Let us worship God!

***Opening Hymn** “In Christ There Is No East or West” 548 Blue Hymnal

A Prayer of the People – “If Love Be There” by Robert Weston (adapted)

**This day, I will set aside all that divides me from others.
This day, I will remember that the world is beautiful to the one
who is willing that it be so and that into the open, eager heart,
the beauty enters in if love be there.**

**This day, I will make a part of the song of life.
There may be grief, but if there be love, it will be overcome.
There may be pain, but it can be borne with dignity and courage.
There may be difficulty, but it can be turned to strength.
Remembering that the world is beautiful,
I will let it be so for others whom I meet.
This day, I will be a part of the song of life.**

Amen.

A Moment of Silence

SERVICE OF THE WORD

Scripture Reading Acts 2:1-21

***Gloria Patri No. 338 Red**

**Message “In the last days....” Rev. Dr. Susan
Stonestreet**

***Hymn of Meditation “Breathe On Me, Breath of God” 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 Panis Angelicus (Bread of Angels) -- Cesar Franck

***Doxology No. 95 Blue Hymnal “Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow...”**

***Prayer of Dedication**

Service of Holy Communion (see insert)

***Closing Hymn “Forward Through the Ages” 555 Blue Hymnal**

Benediction

Postlude March in C -- Henry Purcell (1659-1695)

Revised Common Lectionary Readings for Sunday, June 12, 2022

Guest Preacher – Rev. Carl Shesler

Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31; Psalm 8; Romans 5:1-5; John 16:12-15

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-6/12/22.....9:30 am: Worship Service

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 her to stop by for a visit sometime. She’s always glad to have a chat with you!

Suggested Food Pantry Donation..... Peanut Butter

The flowers for the Alter this week are given by Kathleen and Ron Anderson.

Deacon for June, 2022: Mary Lou Steger

Reminders for next Sunday, June 12, 2022:

Greeter/Usher: Frances Hernandez

Coffee Host:

Lector: Janet Dwelley
Flowers:
Collection Total for Sunday,
Pledges -
Loose -
Total -

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**

June 5, 2022

8 Hyler Street, Thomaston, Maine 04861 (207) 354-6105
To contact the Pastor via e-mail: freerangepastor@gmail.com
WiFi password is #1Church

^[1]M. Eugene Boring and Fred B. Craddock, *The People's New Testament Commentary*,
Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009, p. 364.