

“Sunday words” for June 6, 2021

Good warm Sunday morning from a hill in Rockport!

I'm sitting in our living room right now, watching a Cardinal and a Catbird debate over which of them is going to sit on the feeder and eat suet! They seldom sit together on the feeder and have their suet meal. They're not of the same bird group, but they are both of the overall family of winged beings we call birds. Today we will ponder what "family" and the "will of God" have in common in our Sunday service. They are connected, whether we're in the midst of some family angst, or feeling some distance from any will of God at all. As you've heard me say many times, we're all in this thing called life together, whether we know it or not, whether we like one another or not, or whether we call one another family or not. God knows.... God only knows....

Here's a few thoughts to ponder on this magnificent late Spring day:::::

*Erma Bombeck, 20th century* -- "When your mother asks, 'Do you want a piece of advice?' it's a mere formality. It doesn't matter if you answer yes or no. You're going to get it anyway."

*Oscar Wilde, 19th century* -- "After a good dinner one can forgive anybody, even one's own relatives."

*Trenton Lee Stewart, 21st century* -- "You must remember, family is often born of blood, but it doesn't depend on blood. Nor is it exclusive of friendship. Family members can be your best friends, you know. And best friends, whether or not they are related to you, can be your family."

Read all below as you wish and will. Just come, just seek, and you never know what you might find out about yourself and those around you in these coming months.

A reminder – now that our covid restrictions are being lifted day by day, if any of you would like me to come visit with you in your homes, just let me know, o.k.? Many of you are aware that I am NOT a “dropper inner”..... I won't show up at your door without an invitation..... Send me an e-mail at [freerangepastor@gmail.com](mailto:freerangepastor@gmail.com) or [susanstst@aol.com](mailto:susanstst@aol.com), or call me at 207-322-1948.

I've included this morning's service of Holy Communion, after the end of the sermon, for those of you who cannot join us for worship today. You might wish to hold this holy moment at home.... You never know what might come as a result of the action....

Blessings and love to all this warm June day, Susan

**Federated Church in Thomaston  
United Church of Christ    United Methodist Church  
All Are Welcome**

**Sunday, June 6, 2021**

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** Christ, we adore and worship Thee -- Theodore DuBois (arr by Roger C. Wilson)

**Call to Worship**

Leader: In the stillness of this hour, may we find the spiritual nourishment we need now.

**People: In the gathering of this worshiping community, may we feel the genuine support of one another.**

**All: In the will of God, may we find ourselves energized. Let us worship God!**

**\*Opening Hymn** “He Leadeth Me: O Blessed Thought” (see insert)

**An Invocation....**

**A Prayer of the People – “My Lord God....”** (from *Thoughts in Solitude* by Thomas Merton)

**My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so, but I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road though I may know nothing about it. I trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me. You will never leave me to face my perils alone. Amen.**

**A Moment of Silence**

**SERVICE OF THE WORD**

**Scripture Reading** Mark 3:20-35

**\*Gloria Patri**

**Message** *“Whoever does the will of God....”* Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet

**\*Hymn of Meditation** “Be Thou My Vision” (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** Fill my Cup, Lord -- From the hymn tune by Richard Blanchard  
(Offering plates are placed in the back of the sanctuary. Thank you!)

**\*Doxology** No. 95 Blue

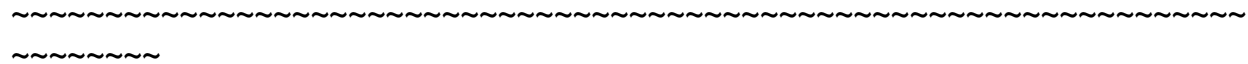
**\*Prayer of Dedication**

**Service of Holy Communion** (see insert)

**\*Closing Hymn** “Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing” (see insert)

**Benediction**

**Postlude** Aria from 10th Organ Concerto -- George Frederick Handel



**Revised Common Lectionary Readings for Sunday, June 13, 2021**

**Ezekiel 17:22-24; Psalm 92:1-4, 12-15; 2 Corinthians 5:6-10, (11-13), 14-17; Mark 4:26-34**

**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** prayers for Ursula who had a mild stroke this week, but seems to be recovering.....

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 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**

Tuesday-6/8/21.....5:00-7:00 pm: Weight Watchers .....7:00-9:00 pm: Music Jam  
Wednesday-6/9/21.....5:00-7:00 pm: Library Spaghetti Take Out Dinner and Bake Sale  
Sunday-6/13/21.....9:30 am: Worship Service

Suggested Food Pantry Donation.....Canned Soups

The flowers this week are given by Sumner and Marjorie Kinney in memory of loved ones.

Deacon for June 2021: Mary Lou Steger  
Reminders for next Sunday, 6/13/21

Greeter/Usher: Frances Hernandez  
Coffee  
Host:  
Lector: Janet

Dwellely

Flowers: Sandra Caron

Collection Total for Sunday, May 30, 2021:

Pledges - \$1149.00

Loose - \$ 222.00

Rental- \$ 160.00 (WW of  
ME.)

Total - \$1531.00

The 2021 weekly budgeted operating cost for the Church and parsonage is \$1623.00  
per  
week.

**“Whoever does the will of God...”**  
**A Sermon for the Federated Church of Thomaston**  
**Thomaston, Maine**  
**Sunday, June 6, 2021**  
**Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet**  
**Scripture: Mark 3:20-36**

And the crowd came together again, so that they could not even eat. When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, “He has gone out of his mind.” And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, “He has Beelzebul, and by the rule of the demons he casts out demons.” And he called them to him, and spoke to them in parables, “How can Satan cast out s Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come. But no one can enter a strong man’s house and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man; then indeed the house can be plundered.

Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of eternal sin” – for they had said, “He has an unclean spirit.”

Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, “Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you.” And he replied, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” And looking at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.”

Mark 3:20-36

Will you pray with me. Family God, teach us of your will this day. Remind us *we* are not the creators of your will, but you call us to be *the doers* of your will.... even when we believe we don't have a clue what your will might be. Amen.

Do you know the name Mordecai Segal? He wrote thirty-three books about dogs, one of their titles being *Dog Spelled Backwards*. Think about that.... I have a framed print in our hallway with this quote by Mordecai Segal underneath a photo of three very sweet looking dogs. (show plaque) It says, "Acquiring a dog may be the only opportunity a human ever has to choose a relative." Mordecai Segal died in 2010, but he was one of the most well known writers to help us understand that family takes many forms. If you have a dog in your household, you know that this is true.... And having had cats in my past, I think it's true of them, too!

But family is a tough business, isn't it? Do any of you ever have any conflicts with family members – of the human and blood relation variety, I mean? Don't answer that.... We don't want to be here until Wednesday! In my twenty plus years in ministry I have rarely met a person who hasn't had, or still has, some conflict with at least one family member.

Somewhere I have a little refrigerator magnet that says, "Let's put the 'fun' back in dysfunctional!" I have rarely known of a family that doesn't have some degree of dysfunction among its members! That fact always reminds me of Mordecai Segal's words, "Acquiring a dog may be the only opportunity a human ever has to choose a relative."

So that brings me to our text from the Gospel of Mark for today. Family.... Who IS family, anyway? Jesus says to those gathered near him, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" And looking at those who sat around him, he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.'" (Mk 3:34-35)

Family and the will of God.... two concepts that occupied Jesus' life and ministry from beginning to end. One commentator writes of our text for today, "It is an odd feature of Jesus' ministry that he is open to everybody: Gentiles, Jews, the poor, the demented, the sick, working class, women, tax collectors, sexual outcasts. The only people who provoke Jesus' intolerance are his family, and the normal, law-abiding scribes.... They are least able to make the leap from dedication to religion to openhearted love of God's beloved, disfigured humanity."<sup>[1]</sup>

It's always curious to me that some of our Christian brothers and sisters today insist *they know* what makes up a family more than Jesus did. Strange they never quote the passages of the Gospels that refer to the folks Jesus approached, hung out with, touched and healed. Jesus is, or should be, our role model for the "good family man" who welcomed *all* into his family, all who did the will of God, that is. As the last verse of our text for today from Jesus' lips reads, "Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother." (Mk 3:35)

Yet at the end of the Gospel of John, Jesus, from the cross, asks one of his disciples to take care of his mother, his birth mother, as if she were his birth mother, too. (Jn 19:27) For Jesus, family was not one small group of people related by blood who strictly followed certain religious rules. For Jesus, family was made up of all those who would do "the will of God."

Sounds easy enough, doesn't it? But then the question, the elephant in the room, so to speak, is this: what IS the "will of God." (get responses) On the one hand, there's a simple answer that we read in both the Hebrew Scriptures (that's the Old Testament to Christians), and the New Testament of the Bible – love God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength, and love your neighbor as yourself. Do those two things, and Jesus says.... you're his kin.

On the other hand, the answer is not so easy to discern. What seems "the will of God" to one person or one group of people is not at all the same as what another person or group believes is "the will of God." Were we able to agree on what is truly "the will of God" and how to live it out in our lifetimes, the world would not continue to be in the sorry state it's in and has been for thousands of years....

To some Christians the will of God means their role, as Christians, is to convert as many people as possible to the Christian faith. To them, and in their particular understanding of Christianity, if you want to be "saved," if you want to get to heaven, if you want to "get right" with God, you have to be a Christian. To other Christians, the will of God means living the Golden Rule, and loving God and one another regardless of our religious backgrounds or understandings – no questions asked, no requirements of "switching faiths" needed. I think you know which of those groups I personally favor.

The Rev. James C. Howell, who I had the privilege of hearing preach and lecture at the Festival of Homiletics several years ago, has written in his book *The Will of God, Answering the Hard Questions*, "Most theological questions I field from people have to do with one enormously important yet maddeningly elusive

subject: the will of God. As it turns out, the will of God is not just one thing, but two things, although they are intimately related in surprising ways....”<sup>[2]</sup>

Howell says those two things are these: First, “What is God’s will for me? What am I supposed to do with my life? What should I do in the next five minutes? If I knew clearly what God wanted, couldn’t I at least get moving on it? Would it be something I could happily embrace? Or might it scare the daylights out of me.

Then there is a second question [Howell writes], which doesn’t look *forward* to what I’m about to do, but instead *looks back* to something that happened, usually something awful. My husband was killed in a crash. The boss fired me. The tsunami destroyed thousands of lives. Cancer was diagnosed. My marriage dissolved. [So the second question is] *Why do bad things happen?* Was my unspeakable loss God’s will? Was God trying to tell me something? Why didn’t God intervene?”<sup>[3]</sup>

These questions take me back to the meaning of family. As many of you have heard me say at one time or another – I believe we’re all here to hold one another up in the hard times and to laugh together in the good times. That’s what family members do, right? At least I believe that’s what we’re called to do as members of God’s family....

When I looked up the word “family” in my computer thesaurus and dictionary I found eleven definitions of “family” ranging from “a group of relatives” to “people living together” to “a group with something in common” to “a branch of the Mafia” to “same as wife.”

There simply is no one unique and distinct definition for the word “family.” Today we hear much in the news about “family values,” “family conflicts,” “family reunions,” “family feuds.” We might as well face it – families come in all sizes and kinds, in many forms and in all states of health or ill health – dysfunctional, happy, separated, united, in flux, two-legged or four-legged, but forever together.... no matter what.

James Howell talks about the will of God and how it impacts all our lives in good times and in bad times. *Jesus* talks about the will of God and our role in fostering, in doing, the will of God. All of this fancy theological talk brings me back to Mordecai Segal’s words, “Acquiring a dog may be the only opportunity a human ever has to choose a relative.” We have choices to make – in who constitutes family for us, and in how we will live out the will of God.



Jesus teaches us that being part of a family doesn't mean we all look alike, but it does mean we all love alike.... Jesus tells his listeners that whoever does the will of God is his brother and sister and mother.

Whoever protects those who are small and helpless, whoever noses into line those who need a little direction.

Whoever allows themselves to be put in the care of others is living the "will of God," and in turn living out the teachings of Jesus.

James Howell speaks of the will of God as action on *God's* part as comforter, sustainer, redeemer.... no matter the life circumstances in which we find ourselves. Jesus speaks to those around him and teaches of the will of God as action on *our* part as we live out God's presence in the world, close at hand, and beyond. Which is it for you? Or is it both – God's will I mean? And who *is* family.... really?

Let the people say, "Amen," and let us prepare to receive the Lord's Supper, the table set for each and all of us, no matter whose family name we carry.

## **A Service of Holy Communion**

### **Invitation** (Susan)

(said by the people) **We come to this table, then, young and old, big and little.**

**We come as we are.**

**This table is spread for each of us that we might again know  
that God has come to us,  
shared our common lot, and calls us to join the people of God's new age.**

**We are invited to share in this sacrament not by the church,  
or any one minister, but by Jesus.**

### **A Prayer Over the Elements** (Susan)

### **Remembering The First Supper** (Susan)

### **Offering of The Bread and The Cup**

### **A Prayer of Thanksgiving** (Susan & people)

**Thanks be to you, O God, for the blessings of this table,  
for the blessings of Christ's presence,  
for the blessings of this hope-filled community.  
May we go forth to serve you joyfully and fruitfully.  
Being steadfast in faith, tenacious in love, and abounding in hope. Amen.**

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<sup>[1]</sup>Wendy Farley, *Feasting on the Word*, Year B, Vol. 3, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009, p. 118.

<sup>[2]</sup>James C. Howell, *The Will of God, Answering the Hard Questions*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009, p. ix.

<sup>[3]</sup>Ibid.