

“Sunday words” for June 13, 2021

Good cloudy Sunday morning from a hill in Rockport!

Do you know what tomorrow is? It’s Flag Day! I didn’t think about this until just the past few minutes – it’s 6:12 a.m.... Upon some web searching, I found a long piece from [www.history.com](http://www.history.com) about the origins of Flag Day which begins with these words: “When the American Revolution broke out in 1775, the colonists weren’t fighting united under a single flag. Instead, most regiments participating in the war for independence against the British fought under their own flags. In June of 1775, the Second Continental Congress met in Philadelphia to create the Continental Army – a unified colonial fighting force – with the hopes of more organized battle against its colonial oppressors. This led to the creation of what was, essentially, the first ‘American’ flag, the Continental Colors....

On June 14, 1777, the Second Continental Congress took a break from writing the Articles of Confederation and passed a resolution stating that ‘the flag of the United States be 13 stripes, alternate red and white,’ and that ‘the union be 13 stars, white in a blue field, representing a new constellation.’ Over 100 years later, in 1916, President Woodrow Wilson marked the anniversary of that decree by officially establishing June 14 as Flag Day....”

[Here’s a few other facts I certainly didn’t know:]

- 1) “Unlike setting an intact flag on fire, flying one upside-down is not always intended as an act of protest. According to the Flag Code, it can also be an official distress signal.
- 2) The Flag Code stipulates that the Stars and Stripes should not be used as apparel, bedding or drapery.
- 3) The practice of draping coffins in the American flag is not reserved for military veterans and government officials. On the contrary, any burial may incorporate this tradition.
- 4) Etiquette calls for American flags to be illuminated by sunlight or another light source while on display.”

Hm.... How many of these rules/codes/guidelines do we follow today? Think about that.... particularly as you see people wearing or abusing or misusing the American flag? I’m going to more consciously consider this, especially as we experience so much conflict without our country and beyond our borders.... How can we more sincerely, and honestly, honor the history of our flag, our principles, our citizenship as Americans? You can go to [www.history.com](http://www.history.com) to read more about Flag Day and so much more. I remember my church history professor, Dr. Glenn Miller, saying in

class one day, "History is the breath we give to the present." Are we breathing in that history, or forgetting it to our peril?

This morning we focus again on the parables of Jesus. Here's a few quotes to ponder this afternoon, as you think about the parables of Jesus and the kingdom of God::::

*Martin Luther, 16th century* -- "If you truly understood a single grain of wheat, you would die of wonder."

*Emil Gudmundson, 20th century* -- "May we have faith in life to do wise planting that the generations to come may reap even more abundantly than we. May we be bold in bringing to fruition the golden dreams of human kinship and justice. This we ask that the fields of promise become the fields of reality."

*Anne Frank, 20th century* -- "Everyone has inside of [them] a piece of good news. The good news is that you don't know how great you can be! How much you can love! What you can accomplish! And what your potential is!"

*David Levithan, 21st century* -- "Remember that at any given moment / There are a thousand things / You can love."

*Anne Lamott, 21st century* -- "When God is going to do something wonderful, He or She always starts with a hardship; when God is going to do something amazing, He or She starts with an impossibility."

*G.K. Chesterton, 20th century* -- "If seeds in the black earth can turn into such beautiful roses, what might not the heart of man become in its long journey toward the stars?"

Blessings and love to all this day, the day before Flag Day..... Susan

**Federated Church in Thomaston**  
**United Church of Christ    United Methodist Church**  
**All Are Welcome**  
**Sunday, June 13, 2021**

Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet, Pastor    Alice Billheimer, Organist/ Choir Director  
Lector: Janet Dwelley

*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** Based on the hymn tune "consolation" by Felix Mendelssohn

**Call to Worship** (from today's Psalm reading 92:1-4, 12-15)

Leader: It is good to give thanks to the Lord, to sing praises to your name, O Most High;

**People: to declare your steadfast love in the morning, and your faithfulness by night.**

**All: For you, O Lord, have made me glad by your work; at the works of your hands I sing for joy! Let us worship God!**

**\*Opening Hymn** "Great Is Thy Faithfulness" (see insert)

**An Invocation....**

**An Interpretation of Ezekiel 17:22-24** (see insert)

**A Moment of Silence**

## **SERVICE OF THE WORD**

**Scripture Reading** Mark 4:26-34

**\*Gloria Patri**

**Message** "...he spoke the word to them...." Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet

**\*Hymn of Meditation** "Hymn of Promise" (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** It is Well with my Soul -- words by Franklin Ritter, tune by Phillip P. Bliss (Offering plates are placed in the back of the sanctuary. Thank you!)

**\*Doxology** No. 95 Blue

**\*Prayer of Dedication**

**\*Closing Hymn** “Lord, Speak to Me” (see insert)

## **Benediction**

**Postlude** Majestic Finale for Organ

**Revised Common Lectionary Readings for Sunday, June 20, 2021**  
**Job 38:1-11; Psalm 107:1-3, 23-32; 2 Corinthians 6:1-13; Mark 4:35-41**

## **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** continued prayers for Ursula recovering...and for “Cody,” who doesn’t live locally but needs prayers for guidance; **and** Kristin Parker O’Neal, Jo Ann Parker’s daughter, who will be having brain surgery; 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-6/14/21.....5:00-7:00 pm: Weight Watchers .....7:00-9:00 pm: Music Jam Wednesday-6/15/21.....4:30 pm-Church Women

annual picnic and pound  
auction.

.....  
.....All women are welcome  
Sunday-6/20/21.....9:30 am: Worship  
Service

Suggested Food Pantry  
Donation.....Pasta

The flowers this week are given by Lou and Sandra Caron with prayers for World  
peace.

Reminders for next Sunday,  
6/20/21

Greeter/Usher: Frances  
Hernandez  
Coffee Host: Corinne  
Ervin  
Lector: Alice  
Billheimer

Flowers:  
Collection Total for Sunday, June 6, 2021:  
Pledges - \$2333.00  
Loose - \$ 71.00  
Inv Income - \$ 4.68 (Putnam Dividend)  
Deacon's Sunday - \$ 20.00  
Total - \$2428.68

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

*"In using parables, Jesus emphasizes the power of the imagination  
and describes it as even more important than the power of the will."  
~ Nibs Stroupe, Feasting on the Word, Year B, Vol.*

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

*Sunday, June 13, 2021*

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**"...he spoke the word to them..."**

**A Sermon for the Federated Church of Thomaston**

**Thomaston, Maine**

**Sunday, June 13, 2021**

**Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet**

**Scripture: Mark 4:26-34**

[Jesus] also said, "The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes with his sickle, because the harvest has come."

He also said, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade."

With many such parables **he spoke the word to them**, as they were able to hear it; he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples.

Mark 4:26-34

Will you pray with me. Storytelling God, you grace us with images that are sometimes easy to imagine, and yet other times confoundingly challenging. Remind us that stories often reveal more about the holiness of our daily realities than all the facts of the day. Amen.

I want to read to you again the passage from Mark for today, but this time from the rendering of it by Eugene Peterson in his book, *The Message, the Bible in Contemporary Language*.

"Then Jesus said, 'God's kingdom is like seed thrown on a field by a man who then goes to bed and forgets about it. The seed sprouts and grows -- he has no idea how it happens. The earth does it all without his help: first a green stem of grass, then a bud, then the ripened grain. When the grain is fully formed, he reaps -- harvest time!

'How can we picture God's kingdom? What kind of story can we use? It's like a pine nut. When it lands on the ground it is quite small as seeds go, yet once it is planted it grows into a huge pine tree with thick branches. Eagles nest in it.'

With many stories like these, [Jesus] presented his message to them, fitting the stories to their experience and maturity. He was never without a story when he spoke. When he was alone with his disciples, he went over everything, sorting out the tangles, untying the knots."<sup>11</sup>

I don't know about you, but I have a much easier time "untying the knots" of the Bible by envisioning a pine nut growing into a tree than a mustard seed growing into a shrub. So, I appreciate Peterson's images along side of the more traditional translations of this passage. Jesus used many different examples to get his points across. Even in this single passage, he talks about the kingdom of God in two different ways in two different parables -- first through the image of many scattered seeds and then through the image of one single mustard seed.

The first parable, of the many scattered seeds, only appears in the Gospel of Mark. The second parable, of the mustard seed, appears in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke. Perhaps the importance of each lies in the *singularity* of the first

parable about scattered seeds and the *commonness* of the second about one single seed.

The kingdom of God is so big, so grand a kingdom, we could never exhaust all the ways to try to uncover it. It seems that Jesus knew that. And so he used many different images to describe the indescribable -- the presence of God that exists in the smallest seed, the smallest nut, and in the most obscure, most difficult circumstance we might ever imagine with seeds flying all over the place!

The end of our text for today says Jesus "spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it." (Mk 4:33) A few "got it," while many others did not. Same thing happens today, doesn't it? We learn of the word of God, of the kingdom of God.... some hear it.... others do not.

I didn't hear it for the first half of my life. I had no desire to hear it. In fact any talk of it was a total turn off to me. It just didn't apply to *my* life.... I thought.... until I was in my mid-40's.... and my secular, anti-religious personal life unraveled in the deaths of my parents....

But the longer I'm in ministry, and the more I study the scriptures, the more I'm realizing the power of the parables of Jesus to help us understand what he was trying to teach, if only we have "ears to hear." (Mk 4:33) The stories of Jesus' parables appear several times in the three-year lectionary cycle we follow. There's a good reason for their appearance multiple times – they were Jesus' primary way of teaching, way of showing, way of proclaiming the Kingdom of God to any and all who would listen to his words.

South African theologian, Albert Nolan, writes of the parables, "Nothing could be more unauthoritative than the parables of Jesus. Their whole purpose is to enable the listener to discover something for [them]self. They are not illustrations of *revealed doctrines*; they are works of art which reveal or uncover *the truth about life*."<sup>[2]</sup>

Here's an idea.... What if we woke up each morning and our first thought was this -- what a work of art life is! Not only would our individual days go better, the whole world might have a better day! A naive thought, I guess.... but one I'm going to try to work on for myself each day in these coming weeks and months as we emerge from this past fifteen months of separation and mask wearing.

What a work of art this life is! Something tells me Jesus knew it, too, and he spent his very short time in ministry trying to teach people.... through the words he spoke, through the healing he offered, through the sacrifices he made that all of life is exquisite, a work of holy art. All of life makes up the kingdom of God.... sometimes



as a single seed, sometimes as many seeds, sometimes as.... a parable, a story that offers a revelation we wouldn't be able to grasp in any other way.

While I was thinking about writing this sermon, I was watching the birds at the suet feeders on our deck. Then in order to see them closer up without getting up and going to the window and having them fly away, I picked up this pair of binoculars. Suddenly their slightest movements, their smallest attempts to peck a piece of suet, their jumping from one side of the suet pack to the other, took on new meaning for me.... I was witnessing a whole life in these little birds unfolding right before my eyes.

It dawned on me.... A parable is like a pair of binoculars, bringing things close up that seemed far away, focusing on the smallest gestures that bring sustenance to these exquisite little winged creatures of God. I sat there entranced for several moments.... not able to take my eyes off these little guys through the aid of these binoculars.

Jesus' parables are like that.... They bring up close and personal details that we might never notice without some way to magnify them, to highlight the significance of their relevance for our lives. Do you tend to *not* notice lots of things throughout the day? I know I do. Without *something* to get my attention, I stumble through my days and wonder what happened to the hours I somehow filled up, but I don't know how.

Parables *get my attention*. They entice me into thinking about the events of my days through different lenses. They help me focus when life gets very blurry at times. Jesus was the master story teller and teacher of how to find parables all around us. The kingdom of God is like....

The kingdom of God is like my good friend, Pastor Mair, giving a pair of sneakers to a homeless man just out of the hospital who is most likely going to die soon living on the streets of Portland, and then she goes to her ministry's mail box and finds a \$700 check from a church. She writes of how much hope she can bring on the streets with the church's generosity.

The kingdom of God is like a nest of fledgling Phoebes waiting for their momma to fly in and bring them bugs to eat before they can fly on their own and catch their own bugs.

The kingdom of God is like a therapy dog named "Bodie" gently resting her head in the lap of an elderly person sitting in a wheel chair at Quarry Hill.

The kingdom of God is like a sanctuary full of people seeking they may not know what but sensing they can find it here.

The kingdom of God.... what is it like for you?

Let the people say, "Amen."

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<sup>[1]</sup>Eugene Peterson, *The Message, the Bible in Contemporary Language*, Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2002, p. 1816.

<sup>[2]</sup>Quoted in *The Doubleday Christian Quotation Collection*, New York: Doubleday, 1998, p. 300-301.