

Good morning from a cool hill in Rockport....

I've been thinking about metaphors this week. A metaphor is "a figure of speech in which a term or phrase is applied to something to which it is not literally applicable in order to suggest a resemblance, as in 'A mighty fortress is our God.'" Or, in other words, a metaphor is "an imaginative way of describing something by referring to something else which is the same in a particular way.... If one thing is a metaphor for another, it is intended or regarded as a symbol, as in 'The divided family remains a powerful metaphor for a society that continued to tear itself apart.'" (from iPhone Dictionary)

That second example is more than a generic one – it describes the state of our country this week after a Supreme Court decision that will be further dividing us for the foreseeable future. Nance said to me a few days ago, "An earthquake of the soul has happened in our country this week." An earthquake – an upheaval of gigantic proportions – has taken place. Its effects will affect the rights of half of our population – the women in our country – to have control over their own bodies. And it opens up the possibility of further destruction of the rights of gay people and people of different colors who are married, and transgendered people. We do not know when this nightmare of earthquake proportions will end in our country. We do not know if those of us who identify as Christians who believe in free will and responsible living will be able to sit at the same table with Christians who believe they know the will of God and no one else does.... None of us can know "the will of God." None of us....

But I confess this – I know that God is love. That is far more than a metaphor for me. My prayer is that in coming months and years that truth becomes so ingrained in a majority of us that our rights and freedoms will not be further eroded by six people sitting in black robes who would desire to take those rights and freedoms away from us. May God help us to keep from destroying one another in these tumultuous times....

Blessings to each one in this earthquake moment in our lives as citizens of a democratic nation.... Susan

"In the beginning.... part two"

A Sermon for the Federated Church of Thomaston

Thomaston, Maine

Sunday, June 26, 2022

Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet

Scripture: Genesis 1:26-28; 2:7, 18-23

Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have domain over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth., and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."

So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.” (Genesis 1:26-28)

Then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being. (Genesis 2:7)

Then the Lord God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.” (Genesis 2:18)

So out of the ground the Lord God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name.

The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field, but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner.

So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept, then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man.

Then the man said, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken.” (Genesis 2:19-23)

Will you pray with me. Creator God, you continue to surprise us with your presence in our chaotic world. Sometimes we speak and act as if we are aware of you. Other times we can't hear you or see you over the sound of our own loud, sometimes ignorant voices and our seeming blindness to your ways. Open our ears and eyes this day, O God, that we might sense you speaking to us and see you holding us in your eternal light. Amen.

Every time I read from Genesis, the first book of the Bible, written between three and five thousand years ago, I have to ask myself this question, “*Where* did the Bible come from?” From last Sunday, I know you remember the first two verses of Genesis go like this, “In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.” (Gen 1:1-2)

If there was nothing – “a formless void” – in the beginning – I ask myself, how did anyone know to write this story down? There was nobody there but God, so the text says! It's a question that can't be answered, except for the fact that during the time of history in which Genesis was written, there were lots of “creation stories” floating around in various communities, over twenty-five of them as I mentioned last Sunday!

I guess you might say we humans have always had a desire to know where we came from “in the beginning.” We’ve always been curious about all of this... how it all began. Our lives are made up of stories and they began, “in the beginning,” when there was only darkness – in the world, and inside the wombs in which each of us were formed.

We hold many stories in our minds and hearts about our lives, our families, our backgrounds, and our experiences. People three to five thousand years ago held many stories in their minds and hearts. The enduring ones survived. And the Bible is one of the most, if not *the most enduring* book of stories of all time.

So this morning, we focus on that “In the beginning” story of God’s creation with two of the stories about how the first humans came into being. Many people don’t realize these two stories about how humans came into the picture of life on this earth are in the book of Genesis. The one most often cited is the second one we read this morning in our Responsive Reading – about Eve, the first woman, being formed out of the rib of Adam, the first man.

But the first story that Alice read first this morning, says “So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” (Gen 1:27) No mention of an Adam or an Eve. Just this -- God created humankind in his image, male and female he created them. How can this be? Two entirely different tellings of how we came about! And they both appear in the first and second chapters of Genesis with equal emphasis. How come that’s the case? What do you think? (get responses)

Biblical scholars have pieced together the writing from that time and have concluded that two different writers or groups of writers wrote each of these passages of Genesis. One told the story of the creation of humans one way – man and woman created together, and the other told it another way – man first, and woman coming from man, from Adam’s rib. So who’s right? Who really knows how we came to be, male and female... thinking human beings given the responsibility to take care of all of creation on behalf of God, who started the whole shebang?

And today, in our time, the matter of who is a man and who is a woman, and who is transgendered, and who is a “they,” not a man or a woman, is a fairly new understanding of who we are, as individuals.

“The Bible says.....” there are only men and only women, and they are who they were identified as male or female at birth. End of story.... I cannot wade into

that argument for this reason, I can only speak of the individuals I know who are gay, who are transgendered, who identify as a “they,” not as him or her.

I only know about Walter, my hairdresser for the past twenty plus years, who lives with his partner, Russ, in Bangor. I only know about Del, who is a transgendered man in Florida, who I knew as Adele, a woman, for twenty-five years. I only know of good friends of Nance’s granddaughter, Carson, who are “they’s”.....

I only know about people, flesh and blood people, I don’t know about labels, or issues, or controversies, or a line from the Bible written between three and five thousand years ago that some people say ends the debate.

I cannot in good conscious, as an ordained minister of the United Church of Christ, proclaim that I know what was in the mind of God “in the beginning.” I only know people who are good and loving and upstanding citizens and partners and friends. As much as I love the Bible, words in the Bible do not trump what I know of personhood – in the flesh, for real, now.

We are in the midst of a hot moment in our country this week over the matter of abortion. The fragility and the sanctity of the soul and the freedoms of our democratic nation are at stake in this pivotal moment. The future of the legitimacy of gay marriage and transgendered rights are most likely soon to be questioned, now that the prohibition of abortion has been sanctioned by the highest court in our country.

This isn’t politics, folks, this is people’s lives. It is my life with Nance. It’s my hairdresser’s life with his partner. It’s Del’s life as a transgendered man. It’s Carson’s friends who choose to be identified as “theys.”

Lutheran theologian David Lose, has written, “The Bible is a human book that God uses to achieve God’s divine purposes. The Bible captures the distinct confessions of faith of its many authors. To hear these confessions of faith, it’s important to pay attention to the details...”^[1] And, I would add, to remember that the details – of the Bible, written so long ago, and of our lives today – sometimes do not agree with one another – as in the creation stories and the coming to life of man and of woman.

The “sources” or writers of the Bible came from many different strains, different backgrounds, different times. While keeping that historical FACT in mind, exactly why the Bible came into being is a question we’ll never answer completely. But from the beginning of time, people have had experiences of the

mystery of God they just couldn't keep to themselves. They had to tell others about what they had witnessed of the holy and most sacred moments in their lives.

The Bible is a series or collection of those experiences, their "confessions of faith" that are not *outside* of reason, or *opposed* to reason, but *beyond* reason in ways we cannot understand literally, but only come to believe faithfully... Faith is not the *opposite* of reason, faith *imbues* reason with richness and depth and holiness it could not birth on its own....

Genesis *is* a book of firsts.... the telling of the birth of the world in which we continue to live and in which we hope to thrive. Yes, we could live without reading the Bible. Many people do go through life without ever cracking open its pages to see what it might hold for them. But most of us don't want to live without some sense of faith, the belief, that tells us there is "something more," something beyond us that gives us guidance, comforts us and offers us new life even when we believe we are at the end of our human ropes.

"In the beginning" there was God – the Bible tells us so – and we are living in a time in which we still need, and most of us want, that holy presence in our lives, no matter our religion, our relationships, our rights and privileges, or our responsibility to love one another, regardless of our sex, our station, our color, or our religious or political persuasions.

As we approach the July 4th holiday weekend, we would do well to think about the freedoms we have in our country, and the length we will go to uphold those freedoms.... and to protect them for ourselves and for one another.

Let the people say, "Amen."

Federated Church in Thomaston
United Church of Christ United Methodist Church
All Are Welcome
Sunday, June 26, 2022

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

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 Morning Has Broken -- hymn and variations based on an old Gaelic melody

Call to Worship

One: Dear God, you have created the heavens and the earth and all that is in them,

Many: and you have created us to be stewards of your creation.

All: Grant us the wisdom this day to see how you would have us care for this world and for each other. Let us worship the God of all creation!

***Opening hymn** "This Is My Father's World," #144 Blue Hymnal

A Responsive Reading "selected Biblical texts" (see insert)

A Moment of Silence

SERVICE OF THE WORD

Scripture Reading Genesis 1:26-28

***Gloria Patri No. 70 Glory Be to the Father....**

Message "In the beginning.... part two"

***Hymn of Meditation** "I Sing the Almighty Power of God" #152 Blue hymnal

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

y Theme of Devotion -- Frederic Chopin

***Dox**

ology No. 95 Blue "Praise God From Whom All Blessings

Flow....”

***Prayer of Dedication**

***Closing Hymn** “Lord, Dismiss Us with Thy Blessing” #671 Blue Hymnal

Benediction

Postlude Come, Thou Almighty King -- tune: "Italian Hymn"

Revised Common Lectionary Readings for Sunday, July 3, 2022

2 Kings 5:1-14; Psalm 30; Galatians 6:(1-6), 7-16; Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

Especially we continue to hold in prayer our Ukrainian brothers and sisters.... & those who have lost loved ones in Buffalo, NY and Uvalde, Texas and beyond..... 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... 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, Heather Van Buskirk, and for Tiffany, Lucy’s granddaughter... And for Arlene from NH.... And for Rev. Wayne Sawyer

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

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Tuesday-6/28/22.....1:00 pm: Finance Committee

Sunday-7/3/22.....9:30 am: Communion

Service10:30 am: Coffee

Hour

Suggested Food Pantry Donation.....Canned Soups

The flowers for the Alter this week are given in memory of Dan Merrill’s parents, Henry and Pearle Merrill, from Janet Dwelley.

Deacons for July, 2022: Ursula Kruse-Vaucienne

Reminders for next Sunday, July 3, 2022:

Greeter/Usher: Janet Dwelley
Harjula
ector: Janet Dwelley
Harjula

Coffee Host: Jackie
L
Flowers: Jackie

Collection Total for Sunday, :

Pledges -
Loose
-
-

Total

The 2022 weekly budgeted operating cost for the Church and parsonage is \$1623.00 per week.

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

Sunday, June 26, 2022

*“The Bible is a human book that God uses to achieve God’s divine purposes.
The Bible captures the distinct confessions of faith of its many authors.
To hear these confessions of faith, it’s important to pay attention to the details...”*

Professor David Lose, *Making Sense of Scripture, Leader Guide*

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

To contact the pastor via e-mail: freerangepastor@gmail.com

WiFi password is #1Church

^[1]David Lose, *Making Sense of Scripture, Leader Guide*, Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 2009, p. 35.