

“Sunday words” for July 3, 2022

Good morning from a cloudy hill in Rockport where the birds have awakened for the day....

It’s the July 4th weekend – when hamburgers and hot dogs sizzle on many American grills, and many dogs tremble and shake when the fireworks start to go off in the night sky. Noise and grilling out have become major identifiers of this annual holiday in our country, along with parades and proclamations. Hear these words from Mary Scifres, a United Methodist pastor, motivational speaker, teacher, and author, about July 4th, Independence Day....

“Since 1776, the Declaration of Independence has been celebrated and commemorated in the United States on or around the fourth day of July. This Fourth of July holiday has since also become known as Independence Day, having been declared a national holiday in the nineteenth century. Celebrations usually center on community and family gatherings with food, games, and fireworks....

This day can be particularly challenging when its sole focus rests upon patriotism. However, interpreted as a day to celebrate freedom and the responsibilities that come with that freedom, this day can provide a rich opportunity for American people of faith to approach patriotism and citizenship with an understanding that our calling as followers of God can and should inform our actions and choices as citizens of a free nation....

The writers and signers of the Declaration of Independence did not dream of war, though they knew full well that they might have to fight for this nation’s freedom if their dream of justice for this new community of citizens was to move forward to fulfillment. Those first dreamers did not all live to see the First Constitutional Congress. None lived to see the slaves of the nation freed. Yet the dream of freedom and equality continued to live in the heart and soul of this nation.... We wait with patient expectation, dreaming and hoping with each step we take, each action we perform, and each decision we make.” (from *Special Services* by Mary J. Scifres. Copyright 2011 by Abingdon Press)

What steps will you take this weekend, what actions will you perform, and what decisions will you make that will help us become less divided and more united in these fractious times we face each day in our nation?

Blessings to each one this Sunday of the July 4th, Independence Day, weekend!

p.s. I will plan to post my sermon on Facebook later today on both my personal Facebook page, freerangepastor and on the church's Facebook page, the Federated Church of Thomaston.

p.s.s. Note, that I will be taking some vacation time beginning this coming Tuesday, July 5th and ending Thursday, July 14th. I will be in St. Joseph, MN at St. Benedict's Monastery, in a little hermitage-for-one called "Subiaco" which stands beside a cornfield. I will enjoy the quiet and remain silent much of the time....

"one hundred fifty days"

A Sermon for the Federated Church of Thomaston

Thomaston, Maine

Sunday, July 2, 2022

Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet

Scripture: Genesis 6:9-22; 7:24-8:1

These are the descendants of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation; Noah walked with God. And Noah had three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence. And God saw that the earth was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted its ways upon the earth. And God said to Noah, "I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence because of them; now I am going to destroy them along with the earth.

Make yourself an ark of cypress wood; make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and out with pitch. This is how you are to make it: the length of the ark three hundred cubits, its width fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits. Make a roof for the ark, and finish it to a cubit above; and put the door of the ark in its side; make it with lower, second, and third decks.

For my part, I am going to bring a flood of waters on the earth, to destroy from under heaven all flesh in which is the breath of life; everything that is on the earth shall die. But I will establish my covenant with you; and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you. And every living thing, of all flesh, you shall bring two of every kind into the ark, to keep them alive with you; they shall be male and female. Of the birds according to their kinds, and of the animals according to their kinds, of every creeping thing of the ground according to its kind, two of every kind shall come into you, to keep them alive. Also take with

you every kind of food that is eaten, and store it up; and it shall serve as food for you and for them.” Noah did this; he did all that God commanded him....

And the waters swelled on the earth for one hundred fifty days. But God remembered Noah and all the wild animals and all the domestic animals that were with him in the ark.

Genesis 6:9-22; 7:24-8:1

Will you pray with me. Creating and redeeming God, out of the abyss of human sin you snatched up Noah and gave us all another chance. Make us mindful of your wisdom in our rocky lives, O God. Give us hope in our storms of discord. Steer us into pools of faith-filled tranquility in our hearts in the midst of a sea of troubled waters all around us. Amen.

The story of the great flood in Genesis and of Noah’s building of an ark, at God’s direction, is one of the major and key stories in the Bible. Even if you’ve never read the Bible or gone to Sunday School, you probably have heard about Noah and the ark and all the animals coming into the ark, two by two. The story is always in collections of Bible stories for children. Depictions of the ark with all the animals are widespread in literature and paintings.

There have been many discussions about the feasibility of this story really being true. A few researchers have said they have discovered the remains of the ark in various parts of the Middle East. But the fact remains – nobody knows whether “the great flood” actually happened. Nobody knows whether a man named Noah actually lived, who built an ark at God’s direction and filled it with his family and all the other living creatures of the earth, two by two, male and female.

These are simply not provable events, just as much of the Bible is not made up of provable events. Many people have discounted the Bible because these events can’t be proven. Many have turned away from faith in God entirely because God cannot be proven. The recounting of the great flood and other biblical events are just stories, made up, mythical, fictitious, and without much value in our modern day, highly scientific, fact-oriented world – so the doubters and skeptics say about biblical accounts of the presence of God in the world. I was one of those “doubters and skeptics” for the first half of my life. “This is all fantasy,” I reasoned, before my life changed and I began seminary at the age of 47.....

But you and I wouldn’t be here this morning if we didn’t find value in these stories. We wouldn’t be here if we weren’t looking for “something” beyond the

physical facts of life that make each day a challenge. We wouldn't be here if we weren't seeking something to help us make sense out of too many senseless events happening every day. Read the newspaper or watch the nightly news or tune the news in on your little smart box or Apple watch and you'll search for anything that will help you keep things in perspective. I know I do, so I have to believe you do, too.

Here's your Sunday School lesson for this morning: "The book of Genesis took form when the Hebrew exiles were in Babylon, between 586 and 536 BCE [that's about five to six hundred years before Jesus was born.] The exiles discussed their experiences and God's activity in Hebrew history as they reflected on their current situation. These reflections brought hope for a different future. Each time the stories were told, people learned more about God: God was present. God listened and watched. God was not a bystander. God was involved. God was not against them, but for them.

In today's passage, God is imagined as having already seen the results of people's wickedness [in Genesis 6:11-12]. The earth – once good – is now corrupt. When the earth was created, God spoke all creation into being and then saw that it was 'very good' (Genesis 1:31) [But] human sinfulness leads to Earth's destruction; and in an act of grace and compassion God re-creates and redeems. Destruction will not be final.

[Enter Noah,] who is obedient to God, and witnesses God's renewal of creation after the flood. God's covenant with Noah is evidence of God's commitment to faithfully protect the earth.... In an ancient worldview, where gods were considered responsible for the future, destruction provided a way to clear away the past and allow a new beginning. The story of the great flood conveys immense hope for the future.... And God involves people [Noah and his family] in bringing about the redemption that only God can accomplish [with very specific details about how the ark should be built.] Such action is a witness to God's grace and compassion [and particularity.]"^[1]

I've told you all before that the way I choose my sermon themes and titles is to read the passage for the day over and over until something jumps out at me. I'm convinced the Bible is a living document, the Word of God, as valuable now as it was in the days it was being put together, because words and phrases continue to jump out at us and have relevance in our lives. The words that jumped out at me this week from our passage were these -- "one hundred fifty days." (Genesis 7:24)

For five months – one hundred fifty days – or more, Noah and his family and all those animals, two by two, stayed in the ark and rode out the flood, so the story goes. Just reading the words makes me a little queasy – many of you know I have a tendency towards sea sickness and claustrophobia! For at least one hundred fifty days, all hell broke loose and the waters came and all those people in Noah’s family and other living creatures were forced to be together in a small boat.

Whether the story of the great flood and Noah and the ark is true in the historical sense, or not, is not the point. The point is what does the story mean for us today? What is “the truth” of it that can help us make sense out of the story we live each day in 2022? (get responses)

It seems to me “the truth” of this story is this – we’re still, or once again, IN that “one hundred fifty days” of being tossed around on a sea of:

sinful and uncaring human behavior,
tremendous and catastrophic natural disasters,
renewed racial and ethnic tensions in our country and abroad,
inhumanity to men, women and children through the injustices of hunger and poverty,
sickness brought on by man-made and natural causes,
economic and societal problems that have led to chaos in our country, like we’ve not known in the past one hundred years, and lastly,
lack of faith in a God who is beyond us.

We live in a society in which the slogan “it’s all about me” has become more of a “truth” than the fact that we need each other. The concept of democracy seems to have gone awry in our country as we remember what happened on July 4th, 1776. What would happen if we began to behave as if we truly relied upon God and one another for our lives. What would happen if we truly believed in the concepts and words of the Declaration of Independence ratified on July 4th, 1776?

I remember a quote that was sent to me some time ago. It goes like this, “After an orange cloud -- formed as a result of a dust storm over the Sahara and caught up by air currents – reached the Philippines and settled there with rain, I understood that we are all sailing in the same boat.” This observation was made by Russian Astronaut, Vladimir Kovalyonok. (appeared in a [gratefulness.org](https://www.gratefulness.org) post)

WE are all sailing in the same boat, my friends. We’re living in a chaotic, choppy world. Whether we like it or not, we are both stuck in the same boat and given unique opportunities to either help make things get better or cause them to

get worse. Which will it be? That's the question before us. It was the question before Noah. HE "did all that God commanded him." (Genesis 6:22)

Now if you read further on in Genesis, and I recommend you do, you know that Noah was not totally "good" before God. He got drunk.... Well, that's a topic for another sermon. But the point is God is with us, no matter what. God will not leave us alone, no matter how rotten we behave. God will always give us another chance.

We may be in a time of turbulent "one hundred fifty days" that will go on longer than any of us can imagine. But remember this – no matter how much we deny God in our lives and in our sick world, God remembers each of us, just as God remembered Noah.

Let the people say, "Amen."

**Federated Church in Thomaston
United Church of Christ United Methodist Church
All Are Welcome
Sunday, July 3, 2022**

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 God of our Fathers, Whose Almighty Hand -- Hymn tune "National Hymn" by George W. Warren (from 1892)

Call to Worship

One: Come and let us remember the place of holy contemplation in our lives.

Many: Come and let us accept the assurance that God remembers us!

All: Let us worship the God who gives us chance upon chance to do good, to receive forgiveness and to go forth with hope.

***Opening hymn** "Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing" #400 Blue Hymnal

A Responsive Reading “A Prayer for July 4th” (see insert)

A Moment of Silence

SERVICE OF THE WORD

Scripture Reading Genesis 6:9-22, 7:24, 8:1

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

Message “one hundred fifty days”

***Hymn of Meditation** “Take My Life, and Let It Be” #399 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 "Peace," an aria from 10th organ concerto -- G.F. Handel

***Doxology**

ology No. 95 Blue “Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow....”

***Prayer of Dedication**

Service of Holy Communion (see insert)

***Closing Hymn** “America the Beautiful” #696 Blue Hymnal

Benediction

ion

Special music “My Country Tis of Thee” & “God Bless America” signed & sung

Revised Common Lectionary Readings for Sunday, July 10, 2022
Guest Preacher – Rev. Dick Hanks
Amos 7:7-17; Psalm 82; Colossians 1:1-14; Luke 10:25-37

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 and Kurt Leidenroth who has broken his leg.

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! EXCEPT, she will be out of town on vacation from Tuesday, July 5th through Thursday, July 14th

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Thursday-7/7/22.....10:00-2:00
pm: Quilters
Sunday-7/10/22.....9:30 am: Worship
Service
Suggested Food Pantry
Donation.....Pasta

The flowers for the Alter this week are given in loving memory of my son, Michael John Dion, by Jackie Harjula.

Deacons for July, 2022: Ursula Kruse-Vaucienne

Reminders for next Sunday, July 10, 2022:

Greeter/Usher: Janet

Dwelley

Coffee

Host:

Lector: Sandra

Caron
mi and Gerry
Zwick

Flowers: Mi

Collection Total for

Sunday, 6/26/22:

Pledges - \$1776.00

Loose

- \$ 266.00

Rental - \$ 25.00 (Finnish
concert)

Total

- \$2067.00

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, July 3, 2022

Words of George Washington, our first President....

“Truth will ultimately prevail where there is pains to bring it to light.”

“Guard against the impostures of pretended patriotism.”

“Labor to keep alive in your breast that little spark of celestial fire called conscience.”

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

^[1]In *Seasons of the Spirit* for Sunday, June 1, 2008, p. 36.