

Good rainy Sunday morning from a hill in Rockport!

We need the rain.... Don't let it dampen your thanksgiving that we are invited to share on this important day of remembering our beginnings in America in 1776!

I remember another day of independence celebration. I was standing on a street corner with three American colleagues in Novorossiysk in the south of Russia in late July, 1994. We were witnessing the celebration of "Liberation Day" which commemorates the day that Novorossiysk was liberated at the end of World War II. We observed troops of Russian soldiers march by in serious style and formation. We watched Russian children stand in line to lay bouquets of flowers on Russian statues commemorating this important day for the people of Novorossiysk. We heard Russians singing songs of celebration about the day of liberation from their enemies in World War II. I remember saying to my three colleagues, "Did you ever think we would be standing on a Russian sidewalk watching Russian troops march by, observing Russian children lay wreaths on statues, and hearing Russian citizens sing songs of freedom and joy?" "No," my colleagues responded. And I am sorry to say, I've never witnessed such respect, honor and reverence paid to Independence Day in our country. This saddens me very much each year as I remember that scene of me and my three American friends watching Russians remember their history so sincerely and so passionately....

Here's a few quotes about Independence Day to reflect upon:

"My God! How little do my countrymen know what precious blessings they are in possession of, and of which no other people on earth enjoy!" ~ Thomas Jefferson

"America was not built on fear. America was built on courage, on imagination and an unbeatable determination to do the job at hand." ~ Harry S. Truman

"Then join hand in hand, brave Americans all! By uniting we stand, by dividing we fall."

~ John Dickinson

"Those who deny freedom to others deserve it not for themselves." ~ Abraham Lincoln

"My father described this tall lady who stands in the middle of the New York harbour, holding high a torch to welcome people seeking freedom in America. I instantly fell in love."

~ Yakov Smirnoff

Blessings to each one this Independence Day.... Susan

p.s. We will share in Holy Communion this morning, as we have these past few months, coming forward to receive the Bread and the Cup....

p.s.s. I will ask that we still sing with our masks on, in light of the growing number of people being affected by the newer strains of the coronavirus in our country, both those unvaccinated and some vaccinated individuals. Singing still “offers,” or presents, one of the major ways of spreading the virus.

“great and awesome things”
A Sermon for the Federated Church of Thomaston
Thomaston, Maine
Sunday, July 4, 2021
Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet
Scripture: Deuteronomy 10:17-21

For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who is not partial and takes no bride, who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them food and clothing. You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. You shall fear the Lord your God; him alone you shall worship; to him you shall hold fast, and by his name you shall swear. He is your praise; he is your God, who has done for you these great and awesome things that your own eyes have seen. Deuteronomy
10:17-21

Will you pray with me. God of the oldest and the newest teachings of faith, give us discerning minds and open hearts this fourth of July. Teach us how to interpret your Word that we might learn to distinguish between true prophets of your will in our sacred history, and in our current life, and those who are not. Amen.

Today is Independence Day in America. Tomorrow, July 5th, will be the day that Americans are given a “day off” from work in recognition of the significance of the day we remember each year as the birthday of our country. Tomorrow is a Federal holiday in America.

Each year I think of July 4th, Independence Day, as a wake up call. (put bell on pulpit and sound it!)

It’s the day we remember the signing of the Declaration of Independence on July 4th, 1776, or thereabouts, when the Second Continental Congress adopted the

Declaration and the birth of the United States of America as an independent nation! (sound bell)

It's the day we remember to sing patriotic songs as we are this morning, acknowledging the struggles, the contributions, and the sacrifices of our forefathers, and foremothers! (sound bell)

It's the day we remember how to make that great potato salad and coleslaw that our mothers and grandmothers used to make for us! (sound bell)

And it's the day we remember, more than any other day of the year, that we are one nation, under God, indivisible and with liberty and justice for all! (sound bell)

And it's the day we remember, or should remember, that not all in our country feel that sense of liberty and justice as much as some of us do. (silence bell)

Have you read the entire Declaration of Independence? I hadn't, I'm embarrassed to say, until last night. But we know the most famous words from the Preamble of this life changing document: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men (I so wish it had said "all people") are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness...." (sound bell) The Declaration of Independence "expresses the ideals on which the United States was founded and the reasons for separation from Great Britain." (source: archives.gov)

It's the ideals that hold us together, and it's the ideals that too often separate us. How do we ever come together as a nation of independent states sharing the same ideals, the same self-evident truths, the same unalienable rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness? What do you think? Why can't we all be on the same page on this July 4th, Independence Day? (get responses)

I don't have a good answer to the question of why we can't seem to agree on our country's ideals. But I have a suggestion: read the Book of Deuteronomy from the Hebrew Scriptures, the Old Testament to Christians. Deuteronomy was most likely written around 1,400 BC, that's about 1,400 years before Jesus was born. It's old. (sound bell)

"Deuteronomy is a sermon – actually a series of sermons. It is the longest sermon in the Bible and maybe the longest sermon ever. Deuteronomy presents Moses, standing on the plains of Moab with all Israel assembled before him, preaching. It is his last sermon. When he completes it, he will leave his pulpit on the plains, climb a mountain and die."¹¹¹ I do hope I don't die as soon as I've

delivered my last sermon! This sermon, to give you a heads up, will be one of my shortest, not one of my longest!

Our brief text for today from Chapter 10 of Deuteronomy highlights “the great God, mighty and awesome, who is not partial and takes no bribe, who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them food and clothing. You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.” (Deuteronomy 10:17-19)

July 4th is the day each year that I try to remember most of us were strangers in this land of ours at one time or another, if not through our immediate relatives, then through our distant ones. My oldest known ancestor’s name was Elizabeth Stonestreet and she lived in West Virginia from the late 1700’s to the early 1800’s. Before then her ancestors probably came from Germany or England.

We’re all strangers here, recent immigrants or distant relatives of immigrants, unless Native American blood courses through our veins in greater or lesser amounts. If only we tried harder, couldn’t we somehow find the thread of the American ideal of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness that could bring us all together in a giant quilt of fellowship and citizenship? (sound bell)

July 4th, Independence Day, is wake-up call day! (sound bell) Let us wake up, sing, give thanks, and share in Holy Communion with all who choose to partake this day. Let the people say, “Amen.

Federated Church in Thomaston
United Church of Christ United Methodist Church
All Are Welcome
Sunday, July 4, 2021 – Independence Day

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

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

Thank you for my week of vacation and thanks to Bob Dorr for stepping up to the pulpit plate last Sunday!

We will have our offering taken this morning pew by pew as in the “old days”....

I will ask that we continue to wear our masks when we sing...

We will share in Holy Communion in the way we have done these last two months, maybe next month we will return to the way we partake of the Holy Meal as we did in the "old days."

Prelude For All the Saints -- hymn tune by Joseph Barnby

Call to Worship

Leader: God of endless possibilities, kindle in our hearts a passion and fire to fulfill your hopes and dreams for this nation and this world.

People: **Guide us to be the people you envision in us. Guide our nation to be a place of opportunity – where the downtrodden may find strength and the poor and abandoned may find hope.**

All: **Reign in our lives and in our nation, that our position of power upon this earth may be a reflection of your glory and your love. Let us worship God!**

***Opening Hymn** "O Beautiful for Spacious Skies" (see insert) (#68, Red Hymnal)

An Invocation....

"A Prayer of Thanksgiving for Independence Day"

God of dreamers and visionaries, you have given us much to be grateful for.

Thank you for the dreams and visions that bring us to this day.

Thank you for the promise of grace that calls upon us to build your holy realm.

Thank you for the freedoms that make possible our pursuit of liberty and justice for all.

**Thank you for the call to grow in your truth and to walk in your ways,
that we may be a people of hope, a light for the nations, and a community of love for all.**

A Moment of Silence

SERVICE OF THE WORD

Scripture Reading Deuteronomy 10:17-21

***Gloria Patri**

Special Music "God Bless America" signed & sung with Mary Lou's help

Message "*great and awesome things*" **Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet**

***Hymn of Meditation** "God Bless Our Native Land" (see insert) (#66, Red 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 Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory of the Coming of the Lord -- Battle Hymn of the Republic by Julia Ward Howe.

***Doxology No. 95 Blue**

***Prayer of Dedication**

Service of Holy Communion (see insert)

***Closing Hymn** "This Is My Song" (see insert) (#437, Blue Hymnal)

Benediction

Postlude A Flourish of Trumpets! -- Lani Smith

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Revised Common Lectionary Readings for Sunday, July 11, 2021

Amos 7:7-15; Psalm 85:8-13; Ephesians 1:3-14; Mark 6:14-29

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; 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, 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 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-7/6/21.....5:00-7:00 pm: Weight Watchers

Sunday-7/11/21..... 9:30 am: Worship Service

Sunday-7/18/21.....10:45 am: Church Annual Meeting

Suggested Food Pantry

Donation.....Toilet Paper

The flowers this week are given by Ursula Kruse-Vaucienne to honor her amazing and best friend Mary Lou Steger with gratefulness for all she does for all of us.

Reminders for next Sunday, 7/11/21

Greeter/Usher: Janet Dwelley
Host:

Coffee

Lector: Sandra Caron
Worshippers: Lucy Carey

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Collection Total for Sunday, June 20, 2021 June 27, 2021:

Pledges -	\$240.00	\$830.00
Loose -	\$333.00	\$105.00
Rental-	\$160.00	WW of ME
Total -	\$1668.00	

The 2021 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 4, 2021

Independence Day

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

FCT email is thomfedchurch@gmail.com & WiFi password is #1Church

^[1]From *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language*, by Eugene H. Peterson, in the Introduction to Deuteronomy, Colorado Springs: NavPress Publishing Group, p. 184.