

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

I'm thinking about "community" this morning.... Most of you know I read the obituaries every day in both the Knox and Waldo Village Soup postings on line, and sometimes the Pen Bay Pilot obituaries, too. Each day I marvel at the variety of lives people have lived, no matter the length of their days. Some obituaries are just the recordings of their birth and death dates, where they took their final breath, and maybe a listing of those who have gone before them and those who have survived them. And then other obituaries go on and on with the accomplishments, the accolades, the organizations they've belonged to, or started!, and a sharing of their personality traits. What would you want included in YOUR obituary? Should it be short and simple, or long and detailed? Are there things you would want left out? And other things you would absolutely want included? Who better to write your obituary than you – the person who knows you so well, and most accurately?!?

So how does this relate to my thinking about community this morning? It relates because community is all of us – those of us with short obituaries, and those of us with obituaries that go on for pages, those of us accomplished in the public eye, and those of us who have led quiet, not-so-public lives. Each life is important, "no matter the length of our days," as I often say in my benediction for Sunday church and at gravesides. I add that phrase to the words of Henri Auriel which I have adapted and hold deeply in my mind and heart each day:

"Life is short [no matter the length of our days].

We do not have much time to gladden the hearts of those who make the journey with us.

So be swift to love. Make haste to be kind.

And may the Creator of us all, the Redeemer of us all, and the Sustainer of us all
be with you now and forever. Amen."

No matter the length of our days, no matter the length of our obituaries, no matter anything at all, each of us is an important and vital member of our community, our way of life, the communal household of God. May it always be so. May the challenges of our diversity make us a stronger people. May our place in this life count just as it is, no more, no less, just enough....

Blessings to each one this becoming sunny July morn.... Susan
p.s. I hope many of you can join me for worship this morning, in person! in our sanctuary, or on line. And remember that next Sunday, July 18th, we will hold our Annual Meeting of the church after our Sunday worship service. All welcome and encouraged to attend....

"....amazed at their unbelief"

A Sermon for the Federated Church of Thomaston

Thomaston, Maine

Sunday, July 11, 2021

Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet

Scripture: Mark 6:1-13

He [Jesus] left that place and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. On the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, “Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands!

Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?” And they took offense at him.

Then Jesus said to them, “Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house.” And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. And he was amazed at their unbelief. Then he went about among the villages teaching.

He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics.

He said to them, “Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.”

So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them. Mark 6:1-13

Will you pray with me. O God of all believers, and unbelievers, too, be with us in these coming moments as we struggle with the offense of familiarity and the difficulties of discipleship. May my words not be too familiar or too difficult to follow, but responsive in some small way to your wisdom. Amen.

Did you ever hear that old definition of an “expert”? An expert is “the person who comes from at least twenty-five miles away and carries a briefcase.” By that definition, Jesus was clearly no “expert” when he entered his hometown to teach and preach in the synagogue. He had *come home* and he certainly wasn’t carrying any briefcase! Those who heard him were “astounded.” “They said, ‘*Where did this man get all this?*’.... And they took offense at him.... And [Jesus] was amazed at their unbelief.” (Mark 6:2, 3, 6)

The old adage “familiarity breeds contempt” certainly could have been coined from our text this morning! The Gospel of Mark tells us that Jesus “could do no deed of power there [in his hometown], except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them.” (Mark 6:5)

Did you ever try to give your spouse or your girlfriend or your boyfriend some advice, only to have them not pay any attention to you at all? Then at

another time, someone else tells them the same thing and they think it's the best advice they've ever gotten? Don't you hate it when that happens?

I wonder if Jesus must have felt somewhat like that when he was scorned in his own hometown. I can just envision him, under his breath saying again and again, "Why don't these people listen to me!"

I'm trying to envision the scene. Here's Jesus among people who had known him since he was a little boy.

They knew his mother and his brothers and sisters.

They knew him when he worked as a carpenter, a laborer at his craft.

They knew him in all his commonness, all his humanity, all his ordinariness. The he comes home again – hometown boy grown into a man of wisdom and holy teaching and miracles and unheard-of healings.

The text doesn't tell us what the "deeds of power" were that he tried to do without success in his hometown. It just says he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. I'm trying to imagine how that must have made him feel.

You realize you have some unexplainable gift of healing others.

You do heal them in many places.

People clamor to get to you because they believe you can help them, and you do.

And then you come home to hear people say, "Just who do you think you are, young man?" and the power you've had seems to get sucked right out of you.

What a draining and unexplainable turn of affairs for Jesus in his hometown. Some of the commentaries about this text suggest that Jesus *chose* to do no deeds of power in his hometown. But that's not what the original Greek says. Roughly translated, the words are, "And not he could there to do any powerful deed, except on a few sick ones laying on the hands he healed."^[1] He could not perform any major deeds of power, except for a few small healings.

Don't you think he might have wondered if it really had all been true? Maybe it was over. Maybe his time of doing miracles and being the holy man of God that he believed he had become was over. Maybe it was time for him to go back to being a carpenter, a common laborer, who for a brief time had been given a special gift from God, but now it was gone.

But, no, if Jesus had those thoughts they must have been fleeting ones. For the text says simply, “And he was amazed at their unbelief. Then he went about among the villages teaching.” (Mark 6:6)

I am amazed at these few words. I am amazed at them because of the lesson they teach us about how we are to get on in the world when people refuse to understand, or even deny, the power of faith.

I must confess that sometimes I have to turn off the news because I become so annoyed and frustrated over the state of the human condition in the world. There is so much discord. So many angry words are spoken on all sides by the leaders of warring countries, ethnic groups and political parties. Within this country, hatred seems to abound among people who cannot stand the idea that diversity is a good and healthy thing for everyone. There is so much pain and suffering in the world, and too many look the other way, or look only to their own interests, rather than sit down with those “from away” or those who are different from them, to talk out the problems and look to God for help through it all.

I am amazed at the unbelief and cynicism and lack of compassion of so many. Sometimes, I must confess, it gets me down. But then, I come to passages like our text for this morning from the Gospel of Mark and our responsive reading attributed to Mother Teresa.... and, I am renewed.

Jesus was amazed at the unbelief of the people who knew him best, his family and community of his youth. But, as a young man, called by God to serve, he simply went on to teach in other villages after he was rebuked by his own family and community.

He didn't turn around and go back to being a common carpenter.

He didn't doubt his mission.

He didn't go into seclusion and become depressed because the people in his hometown were disbelieving.

He didn't become angry and annoyed – at least at this early point in his ministry.

He went on with his work. He went on with what he knew he had to do – spread the word that God was alive and well in him, and that new life, healed life, was available to all who would choose to believe that it was so.

Jesus died for his work, but he never stopped working. He did it anyway – no matter the disbelieving ones,

the ones filled with hatred for his teachings,

the ones who longed for his power but knew only destructive, death-dealing ways to yield power themselves,

the ones who refused to believe because what Jesus was teaching didn't fit into their small, legalistic, too literal understandings of scripture.

Jesus never gave up, even though there were many times in his ministry when he might have said, "I'm outta here! You people just don't get it! I'm done with you!"

In the last century, Mother Teresa was, in my thinking, one of the most recognized and legitimate disciples of Jesus' teaching and way. She believed, with Jesus, that no matter the cost, no matter the scorn, the hatreds, the disbelieving, the disgust, the mistreatments, the injustices, you keep on going doing what God calls you to do.

You forgive, anyway. You are kind, anyway. You succeed, anyway.

You remain honest and frank, anyway. You build, anyway.

You remain happy, anyway. You do good, anyway.

You give the world the best you've got, anyway.

And you do all of this because, in the final rendering, it is between you and God, not between you and anyone or everyone else.

Jesus and Mother Teresa give us the only direction we need for all we do – here in this church, in Thomaston, and beyond – we are to be amazed at unbelief and cynicism and the hatred of those who are not like us, and then we go on with our work. We do it anyway. Why? Because God needs us....

Let the people say, "Amen."

**Federated Church in Thomaston
United Church of Christ United Methodist Church
All Are Welcome
Sunday, July 11, 2021**

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

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

Please plan to attend the church's Annual Meeting next Sunday, July 18, 2021. This will be our first Annual Meeting since January, 2020! Whether you are an "official" member of Federated, or not, please join us for this important meeting where the budget will be voted on, and new officers for the church will be voted on, too! A light lunch will be served right after the meeting which starts shortly after the morning worship service....

Note we are singing from the hymnals this morning (masked, please!), because the tunes may not be as familiar as usual....

Prelude Just a Closer Walk with Thee -- Robert J. Hughes, based on an early American hymn

Call to Worship

Leader: God of grace and powerful weakness, at times your prophets were ignored, rejected, belittled, and unwelcome.

People: Trusting that we, too, are called to be prophets, fill us with your Spirit, and support us by your gentle hands.

All: Guide us so that we may persevere in speaking your word and living our faith. Let us worship God!

***Opening Hymn** "God of Grace and God of Glory" #577 UMC Hymnal

An Invocation....

A Responsive Reading "Do It Anyway" (see insert)

A Moment of Silence

SERVICE OF THE WORD

Scripture Reading Mark 6:1-13

***Gloria Patri**

Message "*....amazed at their unbelief*" **Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet**

***Hymn of Meditation** "Filled with the Spirit's Power" #537 UMC 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 A Finnish melody -- "Come Unto me, Ye Weary, and I will give you Rest."

***Doxology No. 95 Blue**

***Prayer of Dedication**

***Closing Hymn** "See How Great a Flame Aspires" #541 UMC Hymnal

Benediction

Postlude Solemn Finale

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**Revised Common Lectionary Readings for Sunday, July 18, 2021**

**Jeremiah 23:1-6; Psalm 23; Ephesians 2:11-22; Mark 6:30-34, 53-56**

**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](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-7/13/21.....5:00-7:00 pm: Weight

Watchers Sunday-7/18/21.....9:30

am: Worship Service .....**10:45 am: Church Annual Meeting.....Please**

**Attend!!!** .....**A light luncheon following the meeting**

Suggested Food Pantry Donation.....Canned Vegetables

The flowers this week are given by Hank and Lucy Carey in loving memory of Lucy's sister, Betsy.

Reminders for next Sunday,  
7/18/21

Greeter/Usher: Janet  
Dwelle  
Steger  
een  
Anderson  
Hernandez

Coffee Host: Mary Lou  
Lector: Kathl

Flowers: Frances

Collection Total for Sunday, July 4, 2021:

|                   |           |
|-------------------|-----------|
| Pledges -         | \$1998.00 |
| Loose -           | \$ 33.00  |
| Deacon's Sunday - | \$ 18.54  |
| Total -           | \$2049.54 |

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 11, 2021*

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

FCT email is [thomfedchurch@gmail.com](mailto:thomfedchurch@gmail.com)

WiFi password is #1Church

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<sup>[1]</sup> *Greek-English New Testament*, New York: Iversen-Norman Associates, 1976, p. 119.