

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

It's cool now. It wasn't yesterday. It won't be cool later this morning and later today. It's on these very warm days in Maine that I am reminded of my fifteen years of living through very hot and humid days and nights in Florida. By "Maine standards," these are hot, humid days. By "Florida standards," they are a little cooler than usual and not quite so humid. Perspective is a wonderful thing, isn't it?

Having a healthy perspective about many things is hard to keep nowadays, don't you think? I can keep a good perspective about the weather – it helps me get through these very warm days in Maine knowing they won't last as long they do in Florida. Regarding other issues, a healthy perspective is oh so much more challenging. Reading, or hearing, the daily news nowadays about too many situations and issues that are so unsettling challenges my ability to keep a healthy perspective about any of it.

Nowadays.... That's an interesting term, isn't it? The older I become, the more nowadays seeps into my words, my ponderings, my perspective about many things. Nowadays means "at the present day; in these days," according to my little iPhone Dictionary. Maybe nowadays is just shorthand for more words. Maybe using it more shows my age.... nowadays. Why can't we go back to "the good old days," as someone asked me not long ago? Maybe it's because they weren't such good old days for many people in our country and around the world. Again I am reminded that perspective is a handy tool for dealing with all the turmoil of living.... nowadays.

Keep a healthy perspective with me, won't you? And if you choose to join me in church this morning, please dress comfortably and lightly! You might find me in a light skirt and a loose shirt. It's going to be warm in our sanctuary. If you choose to stay home and "do church" only with these words, that's o.k. Remember this – the heat doesn't last in Maine, not like it does in Florida and so many other places in our country and world.... nowadays.

Blessings to each one this warm Sunday morning.... Susan

p.s. I will be leading worship at Bartlett Woods this afternoon, and will try to post my sermon on my and the church's Facebook pages after that.... unless I'm too hot and tired by then to do it today.... Stay tuned.....

“....only to test you....”

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

Sunday, June 24, 2022
Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet
Scripture: Exodus 19:1-8 & 20:1-22

On the third new moon after the Israelites had gone out of the land of Egypt, on that very day, they came into the wilderness of Sinai. They had journeyed from Rephidim, entered the wilderness of Sinai, and camped in the wilderness; Israel camped there in front of the mountain. Then Moses went up to God; the Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, “Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the Israelites: You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites.”

So Moses came, summoned the elders of the people, and set before them all these words that the Lord had commanded him.

Exodus 19:1-8

Then God spoke all these words: I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me.

You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.

You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.

Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work – you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and consecrated it.

Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

You shall not murder.

You shall not commit adultery.

You shall not steal.

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

You shall not cover your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

When all the people witnessed the thunder and lightening, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountains smoking, they were afraid and trembled and stood at a distance, and said to Moses, "You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, or we will die." Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid; for God has come only to test you and to put the fear of him upon you so that you do not sin." Then the people stood at a distance, while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was.

Exodus 20:1-22

Will you pray with me. Holy, promising God, be among us in this hour as we wander around in your commandments, all the while reflecting on *your* laws, not ours, and seeking community in the midst of our frailties and foibles. Amen.

I brought a visual aid with me today! It's one of my old running shoes. I don't run anymore, but this shoe has a point to make – this running shoe is like the Bible. The shoe itself is the whole Bible, all of it. Each of these shoelaces represent the Old Testament and the New Testament. Now we know that if we don't tie these laces together this running shoe and it's mate won't work very well. Sooner or later we're going to trip on one of the laces if we're running. The Bible is like that – if we don't consider the whole book, the whole shoe of the story if you will, we can be tripped up big time in any attempt to understand the role of faith, the place of God in our lives as Christians.

Today we're focusing on one of the most well-known, honored and debated texts of the entire Bible – the Ten Commandments. There have been squabbles over their placement, or not, on government buildings, squabbles over which of the Ten Commandments we really ought to follow, and murmurings over which ones we would rather not talk about – like that adultery one, and the one that includes hankering after your neighbor's wife, or your neighbor's slave, ox, donkey, or anything else that belongs to your neighbor.

When Moses, according to the story, is commanded by God to set people straight, we have been brought standing to attention every time the Ten Commandments are presented. It's an age old question – what do we do when one of those pesky commandments trips us up because we've been naughty in ways God does not approve?

Since the beginning... humankind has been missing the mark, to one degree or another, and so there comes a time when God declares, "Enough already! You

people need a little more instruction – some rules, if you will, that I want you to follow!” These rules were eventually called “the Ten Commandments.” I can imagine God probably muttering all the while this part of our sacred history is happening, “Oh Lord, what am I going to do with these erratic, disobedient, exasperating people I have created!?!”

The Ten Commandments cover a lot of territory in their spiritual, moral and ethical tone. They go from honoring God and the Sabbath to, as I mentioned, not having a hankering for your neighbor’s wife, or any other of *his property!* I don’t know about you, but I’d rather not think of the Ten Commandments as a list of “do’s and don’ts,” ancient or modern.

I’d rather not be concerned about whether the Ten Commandments are posted outside of government office buildings.

I’d rather not hear the term, “the Ten Commandments,” and think only of Charlton Heston as Moses parting the Red Sea with those two giant slates of commandments in his big hands on the big movie screen from decades ago.

It seems to me... a more meaningful way to approach the Ten Commandments is to think of them as the vows which two people exchange in their marriage ceremony... the promises they publically make to one another that we, and they, hope will seal their relationship together, until “death do us part,” as the traditional vows read.

Yes, I know the Ten Commandments come down as rather one sided, with the commands coming from “on high” to those of us “down below,” but those commands come from the voice of one who loves us no matter what, in spite of ourselves, and for the greater good of all. Marriage vows and promises are spoken between two equals, but still they seal a relationship affirmed by God whether the two people making the vows and promises are God-focused or not.

Many of our laws and customs – the components of healthy community life – are based on the idea that people living in good relation with one another, in families of many sorts, is a worthy goal for society. All of this comes from the principles outlined in the Ten Commandments. But my guess is many people, if asked, could not recite the Ten Commandments, in order, or not.

Yet these commandments are the foundation of the making of
the productive society,
the compassionate and caring community,
the loving and sacred relationship between God and God’s people,

the commitment that seals the promises made and vows taken in a marriage between two people.

Theologian and writer, Frederick Buechner, writes of marriage, “They say they will love, comfort, honor each other to the end of their days.

They say they will cherish each other and be faithful to each other always.

They say they will do these things not just when they feel like it but even – for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health – when they don’t feel like it at all.

In other words, the vows they make in a marriage ceremony could hardly be more extravagant.

They give away their freedom.

They take on themselves each other’s burdens.

They bind their lives together in ways that are even more painful to unbind emotionally, humanly, than they are to unbind legally.

The question is: what do they get in return?

[Buechner goes on to say,] they get each other in return. Assuming they have any success at all in keeping their rash, quixotic promises, they never have to face the world quite alone again. There will always be the other to talk to, to listen to. If they’re lucky, even after the first passion passes, they still have a kindness and a patience to depend on, a chance to be patient and kind. There is still someone to get through the night with, to wake into the new day beside. If they have children, they can give them, as well as each other, roots and wings. If they don’t have children, they each become the other’s child.

They both still have their lives apart as well as a life together. They both still have their separate ways to find. But a marriage made in Heaven is one where [two people] become more richly themselves together than the chances are either of them could ever have managed to become alone. When Jesus changed the water into wine at the wedding in Cana, perhaps it was a way of saying more or less the same thing.”^[1]

You see... it really *is* all about the promises – the promises of God, the promises of Jesus, the promises we make in marriage vows, the promises we make to one another in this church and in this community, the promises we make *to* God.

Theologian David Lose writes, and the quote is in your bulletins today, “Promises create something; they call something into being by drawing the one

making the promise and the one receiving the promise together.... The promise draws us together in this kind of shared expectation about the future.”^[2]

At the end of our text for today from Exodus, Moses says to the people, “Do not be afraid; for God has come only to test you and to put the fear of him upon you so that you do not sin.” (Exodus 20:20)

Are we up for the test? Do we care about one another enough to pass God’s test? Are the Ten Commandments important for us to follow today in this world of erratic, disobedient, exasperating people? What promises are we willing to make to one another and before God?

May our shared expectations about *our future together* be worthy of our affirmations of, and promises to, one another... and in the greatest scheme of things, God’s affirmation of, and promise to, each one of us.

Let the people say, “Amen.”

Federated Church in Thomaston
United Church of Christ United Methodist Church
All Are Welcome
Sunday, July 24, 2022

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

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 Song at Morn -- Felix Mendelssohn

Call to Worship

One: Dear God, we come together to recognize your love for us and all the world in the giving of covenant and law.

Many: Help us in this hour to be open to how you knit us together as a community for faith and commitment.

All: Let us worship God!

***Opening hymn** “Love Divine, All Loves Excelling” #384, v.1-3 Blue Hymnal

A Moment of Silence

SERVICE OF THE WORD

Scripture Reading Exodus 19:1-8

A Responsive Reading Exodus 20:1-22 (see insert)

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

Message “only to test you”

***Hymn of Meditation** “The Gift of Love” #408 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 Psalm 42 -- J. S. Bach

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

***Prayer of Dedication**

***Closing Hymn** “Standing on the Promises” #374, v. 1- 2, 4 Blue Hymnal

Benediction

Postlude Marche -- Charles Gounod

Revised Common Lectionary Readings for Sunday, July 31, 2022
Hosea 11:1-11; Psalm 107:1-9, 43; Colossians 3:1-11; Luke 12:13-21

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!

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Sunday-7/31/22.....9:30

am: Worship Service

.....10:45: Church Annual Meeting with luncheon after the meeting

Suggested Food Pantry

Donation..... Toilet Paper

The flowers for the Alter this week are given by Sandra Caron with loving birthday wishes for her husband, Lou.

Deacons for July, 2022: Ursula Kruse-Vaucienne

Reminders for next Sunday, July 31, 2022:

Greeter/Usher: Janet

Dwelley

Coffee

Host:

Lector: Jackie
Harjula
ci
DeVarney

Flowers: La

Collection Total for Sunday, 7/17/22:

Pledges - \$338.00
Loose
- \$ 69.00

Total
- \$407.00

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 24, 2022

*“Promises create something; they call something into being
by drawing the one making the promise
and the one receiving the promise together....
The promise draws us together in this kind of shared expectation
about the future.”*

~ Professor David J. Lose, in *Making Sense of the Christian Faith*

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To contact the pastor via e-mail: freerangepastor@gmail.com
WiFi password is #1Church

^[1]Frederick Buechner, *Whistling in the Dark, A Doubter's Dictionary*, New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1988, 1993, p. 86-87.

^[2]David Lose, *Making Sense of the Christian Faith*, Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2010, p. 90.