

Good sticky, warm Sunday morning!

These words will be brief.... because it's hot.... and I'm a little "limp." We're going to gather for worship downstairs in Leach Hall this morning because it will be a little cooler there than in our sanctuary. Hopefully.... this will be the last "hot Sunday" of the Summer! Dress loosely and lightly, if you choose to come to church this morning. Remember to drink plenty of water today. Take it easy..... and remember that for many of the world's peoples, dealing with, and living through, high heat is not a once-in-a-while challenge, but an everyday challenge. We are so fortunate, here on the coast of Maine, to not have to deal with the ravages of nature that affect so many others. Give thanks for this day, for this opportunity to experience what others must deal with day in and day out..... Let's hold all of them in our prayers this day....

Blessings to each one this sticky morning.... Susan

p.s. I'll plan to post my sermon on line on my Facebook page, freerangepastor, and on the church's Facebook page, federated church of thomaston, later today.... unless I'm too hot and sticky to think....

"And the Lord changed his mind...."
A Sermon for the Federated Church of Thomaston
Thomaston, Maine
Sunday, August 7, 2022
Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet
Scripture: Exodus 32:1-14

When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered around Aaron, and said to him, "Come, make gods for us, who shall go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him." Aaron said to them, "Take off the gold rings that are on the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me." So all the people took off the gold rings from their ears, and brought them to Aaron. He took the gold from them, formed it into a mold, and cast an image of a calf; and they said, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!" When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation and said, "Tomorrow shall be a festival day to the Lord." They rose early the next day, and offered burnt offerings and brought

sacrifices of well-being; and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to revel.

The Lord said to Moses, "Go down at once! Your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have acted perversely; they have been quick to turn aside from the way that I commanded them; they have cast for themselves an image of a calf, and have worshiped it and sacrificed to it, and said, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!" The Lord said to Moses, "I have seen these people, how stiff-necked they are. Now let me alone, so that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them; and of you I will make a great nation."

But Moses implored the Lord his God, and said, "O Lord, why does your wrath burn hot against your people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that he brought them out to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth?"

Turn from your fierce wrath; change your mind and do not bring disaster on your people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, how you swore to them by your own self, saying to them, 'I will multiply your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.' And the Lord changed his mind about the disaster that he planned to bring on his people." Exodus 32:1-14

Will you pray with me. Ever patient God, be patient with us – when we don't get what you're trying to teach us. Be patient with us when we construct gods of all kinds to take your place in our lives. Shake your holy head at us, if you must, but please give us another chance, as you gave it to the Israelites of long ago. Amen.

Have you ever changed your mind? I don't mean about what color clothes you're going to wear on a particular day, or what cereal you're going to have for breakfast, or where you're going to go on vacation. I mean about really important things –

like how you're going to live your life,
how you're going to treat and think about people who are different from you,
how you're going to live out your faith in this church in and our community.

Have you ever changed your mind about the most important parts of life? That's the question for the day. And here's the next question – what caused

you to change your mind? What causes you to think differently about a situation or a person or a group of people? (get responses)

When I've changed my mind about important matters, it's usually been for one of two reasons – either I became personally involved with someone who was “on the other side” of the matter and thus I found a new perspective about it, or I learned enough about the matter to discover I was simply wrong in my opinion, estimation, or decision about it.

For the first half of my life, as most of you know, I thought religion, church and anything related to either of those concepts was a bunch of hooey – mumbo jumbo spouted by people who were ignorant and didn't know any better. But I changed my mind in my early 40's. I discovered the errors in my thinking and the ignorance in my heart that never been challenged constructively before.

You might say that our passage for this morning from the Book of Exodus is about a “change of heart.” But in this case, it's not a change of heart by a human, but a change of heart by God that takes center stage. Verse 14 of our passage reads, “And the Lord changed his mind about the disaster that he planned to bring on his people.” The King James translation is “And the Lord repented of the evil which he thought to do to his people.” Eugene Peterson's *The Message* interpretation reads, “And God did think twice. He decided not to do the evil he had threatened against his people.”

The Hebrew word that is used in verse 14 is *naw-kham* which means literally “to sigh, or breathe strongly.”^[1] (do that – sigh!)

God sighed and changed his mind, renounced the punishment, repented of the evil which he thought to do to his people. God thought twice. Of all the verses of this passage that could have jumped out at me this week, it was verse 14 about God changing God's mind that stood out in bold letters before my eyes.

We could have considered the “stiffnecked” nature of the people, their shortsightedness, their inability to grasp and hold onto the notion of deferred gratification.... their seeking after a quick fix for a god of the older cultic kind since their human leader Moses who had introduced them to the God of a new kind was nowhere to be found.

Many people today are no different than those Israelites wandering in the desert in search of some one, some thing to hold onto -- grasping at the words of someone who promises them prosperity and security and protection from those whom they fear and don't like. Let's face it, many of us are fickle much of the

time because we need and want something solid to hold onto in the midst of much uncertainty and many challenges.

It was true way back then.... and it's true now.... especially in the political arena. Which candidate is going to promise the most -- the most that we agree with of course -- and stick to those promises? No matter which side of the political aisle we sit on, it's the promises -- kept and broken -- that sway us in one direction or another in our support of movements and candidates and in our voting booth behavior. That situation has become glaringly obvious in the past couple of years in our country and beyond our country.

The Israelites, who thought their leader Moses had deserted them, were looking for someone to tell them what to do, how to worship, how to be saved in difficult times. They wanted someone to make them a promise and keep it. Aaron, Moses' brother, offered a shortsighted solution -- build a molten calf and worship *it!* But God got a whiff of what was going on down below and lost a holy temper!

God said to Moses (and I paraphrase here!), "For God's sake, I mean MY sake, get down there and straighten these people out. But I have to tell you, I'm done with the whole bunch of them! They're behaving like spoiled children and I've had it! I'm going to wipe *them* out and lead *you* into the promised land."

But Moses sticks his neck out and implores God to give them another chance -- because it's going to make God look really bad if he goes back on the promises he made. Moses says to God, "Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, how you swore to them by your own self, saying to them, 'I will multiply your descendants like the stars of the heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.'" (Exodus 32:13)

"Remember, God. Remember what you said. Remember what you did. You just can't give up on them now, no matter how ignorant and childish and shortsighted they may seem to be." Moses reminded God of promises he made and God changed his mind. As the story goes throughout the Scriptures, God has changed his mind, a change of heart, again and again and again. We just have to ask -- how come God doesn't give up on us when we screw life up again and again and again? What do you think? (get responses)

I think it's because God loves. It's because God *is* love. It's because love *has to* prevail no matter how much we have sinned, no matter how much we grasp onto molten calves of all kinds, no matter how much we turn our backs on

God. God simply cannot turn a back forever, but will always have a change of mind, a change of heart, because that is the nature of faith in God and in God's family – never giving up on them – that's us – never giving in to anger, always turning around and offering a hand of invitation while saying, "You're welcome here. No matter who you are, or where you've been or where you're going on life's journey. You're welcome here."

Let the people say, "Amen."

Federated Church in Thomaston
United Church of Christ United Methodist Church
All Are Welcome
Sunday, August 7, 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 Balm in Gilead -- A Spiritual

Call to Worship

One: In every part of our journey, Holy One, we believe you are with us.

Many: No one is beyond the reach of your gaze and attention. Your awareness is stirred by our concern that all may enjoy justice, freedom, and fullness of life.

All: We worship you with the hope and assurance that you are with us this day!

***Opening hymn "Maker, in Whom We Live" #88 Blue Hymnal**

A Time of Silence....

SERVICE OF THE WORD

Scripture Reading Exodus 32:1-6

Responsive Reading Exodus 32:7-14

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

Message “And the Lord changed his mind....”

***Hymn of Meditation** “Close to Thee” #407 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 Prayer -- Beethoven

***Prayer of
Dedication**

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

Service of Holy

Communion

The Invitation

One: We come to this table not because we must, but because we may. We come not because we are worthy, but because we are human.

Many: We come not because we are church members, but because we long to follow

Jesus

in our words and deeds, no matter our religious affiliations.

All: We come to this table, young and old, rich or poor, in plenty and in want, to share in the holy feast of our lives.

**Remember the First Supper....
Blessing of the Bread and the Cup
Prayer of Thanksgiving**

All: Creator God, you have welcomed us to your table, fed us with your bread and fruit of the vine, nourished us with your eternal love, and filled us with a renewed sense of your divine peace. Empower us to share the good news of your presence in our community and beyond, and to witness to the wonders of your creation with all our heart and mind and soul. Amen.

***Closing Hymn** “We’ll Understand It Better By and By” #525 Blue Hymnal

Benediction

Postlude Stately March -- George Frederick Handel

**Revised Common Lectionary Readings for Sunday, August 14, 2022
Isaiah 5:1-7; Psalm 80:1-2, 8-19; Hebrews 11:29-12:2; Luke 12:49-56**

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.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Sunday-8/7/22.....10:30 am: Council Meeting

Tuesday-8/9/22.....7:00 pm: Thomaston Historical Society Meeting in Leach Hall

Saturday-8/13/22..... 9:00 am – 12:00 pm: Women’s
Summer Fair
Sunday-
8/14/22.....9:30: Worship
Service

Suggested Food Pantry
Donation.....Jello

The flowers for the Alter this week are given by Laci DeVarney in loving memory of her Mom, April DeVarney.

Deacons for August, 2022: Jackie Harjula
Reminders for next Sunday, August 14, 2022:
Greeter/Usher: Arlene

Woodman Coffee
Host:

Lector: Arlene

Woodman Flowers:

Collection Total for Sunday, 7/31/22:

Pledges - \$1041.00

Loose

- \$ 300.00

Total

- \$1341.00

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

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!

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

WiFi password is #1Church

^[1]A *Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Hebrew Bible*, p. 77 in *The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1990.