

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

We had quite a day yesterday in Leach Hall! I won't spoil the suspense about how much we made in our indoor yard sale, but I think all will be pleasantly surprised when the total is announced in church this morning!

One comment I heard yesterday summed it all up – “This is where we see each other!” I suppose these words were said from one veteran “yard sale shopper” to another. But to me, they spoke of a greater wisdom – in the circumstances in which we all find ourselves now. With daily street violence in our country, in the midst of dangerous political fire storms, in the swells of meanness and hatred.... we need to find places “where we see each other”.... I mean really see each other, inside and out, in agreement and disagreement, in respect and lacking of respect.... in Leach Hall, on the sidewalks and in the grocery stores, in our own homes and in our own families.... We need to do a better job of “seeing one another,” don't you think?

Yesterday was an example of how all of that happens – in the stories shared and reminisced about of past yard sales and the great efforts of church members gone by now, Dot, Muriel and others.... in the camaraderie of working together for a good cause.... in the willingness to price yet one more piece of jewelry, one more handmade knitted or quilted treasure, one more bag of cookies, one more “gem” that was once someone's treasure or trash. In all of this lies the best of American values, the truest of volunteer efforts, the finest example of community....

I am proud and privileged to be a part of such a noble effort. I am thankful for all the work of so many who worked hard to make yesterday's event the success that it was. We did it! And we'll do it again, when the next time comes around – to work together, to serve our community, to be present “where we see each other” in all our uniqueness and all our diversity....

Join me for worship this morning and find out the total \$\$\$ we earned for the church yesterday!

Blessings to each one this early Sunday morn..... Susan  
p.s. Note that Rev. Dick Hanks will be leading worship and preaching next Sunday, August 21<sup>st</sup>, as it will be my “once a month” step away from the pulpit.... Thanks to all for giving me this monthly opportunity to catch my breath and rest my “little grey cells”.....

**“...in the cleft of the rock...”**

**A Sermon for the Federated Church of Thomaston  
Thomaston, Maine  
Sunday, August 14, 2022  
Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet  
Scripture: Exodus 33:1-23**

The Lord said to Moses, “Go, leave this place, you and the people whom you have brought up out of the land of Egypt, and go to the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, ‘To your descendants I will give it.’ I will send an angel before you, and I will drive out the CANAA-nites, the AM-o-rites, the HIT-tites, the PER-i-zzites, the HIV-ites, and the JEB-u-sites. Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey; but I will not go up among you, or I would consume you on the way, for you are a stiff-necked people.”

When the people heard these harsh words, they mourned, and no one put on ornaments. For the Lord had said to Moses, “Say to the Israelites, ‘You are a stiff-necked people; if for a single moment I should go up among you, I would consume you. So now take off your ornaments, and I will decide what to do to you.’” Therefore the Israelites stripped themselves of their ornaments, from Mount Horeb onwards.

Now Moses used to take the tent and pitch it outside the camp, far off from the camp; he called it the tent of meeting. And everyone who sought the Lord would go out to the tent of meeting, which was outside the camp. Whenever Moses went out to the tent, all the people would rise and stand, each of them, at the entrance of their tents and watch Moses until he had gone into the tent. When Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent, and the Lord would speak with Moses. When all the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance of the tent, all the people would rise and bow down, all of them at the entrance of their tents. Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend. Then Moses would return to the camp; but his young assistant, Joshua son of Nun, would not leave the tent.

Moses said to the Lord, “See, you have said to me, ‘Bring up this people’; but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. Yet you have said, ‘I know you by name, and you have also found favour in my sight.’ Now if I have found favour in your sight, show me your ways, so that I may know you and find favour in your sight. Consider too that this nation is your people.”

The Lord said, “My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.”

And Moses said to the Lord, “If your presence will not go, do not carry us up from here. For how shall it be known that I have found favour in your sight, I and your people, unless you go with us? In this way, we shall be distinct, I and your people, from every people on the face of the earth.”

The Lord said to Moses, “I will do the very thing that you have asked; for you have found favour in my sight, and I know you by name.”

Moses said, “Show me your glory, I pray.”

And the Lord said, “I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you the name, ‘The Lord,’; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. “But,” he said, “you cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live.”

And the Lord continued, “See, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock; and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by; then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen.”

Exodus 33:1-23

Pray with me. Holy God, be present with us in the coming moments. Redeem us from the cleft of the rock in which we hide from you. Reveal your glory and your wisdom to us this day. Amen.

In 1905, the year my father was born in August!, in a series of lectures on preaching delivered at Bangor Theological Seminary, from which I graduated with two graduate degrees, Charles Edward Jefferson, then pastor of the Broadway Tabernacle in New York City, said these words about preaching,

“The work of preaching is the most difficult of all the things which a minister is called to do. Indeed, it is the most difficult task to which any mortal can set himself. It is at once the most strenuous and the most exacting of all forms of labor. It requires a fuller combination of faculties and a finer balance of powers than are required in any other department of human effort. It is a difficult thing to paint a portrait. To gain the skill required to place the features of the human face on the canvas in such a way as that they shall breathe and speak requires the unflagging toil of years, but how much more difficult it is with human words to paint the face of Christ so that he shall woo and win the hearts of men.”<sup>[1]</sup> Remember this was written in 1905, not 2022!

What strikes me most in these eloquent words about the preaching task is how they relate to our Scripture passage this morning from the Book of Exodus. Moses has a tug-of-war conversation with the Lord in the tent of meeting, (that’s the place of worship) each giving and taking. In the introduction to the conversation we learn that “the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend.” (Exodus 33:11) Then God says that his presence will go with Moses and the people. God’s graciousness and mercy will fall upon all those

whom God chooses, and God's glory will pass by. BUT, then God says, "You cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live." (Exodus 33:20) "My face shall not be seen," says the Lord. (Exodus 33:23)

My task as a preacher, as Jefferson said in 1905, is to use human words to paint the face of God so that you might want to be "wooned and won" by God.

God puts Moses in a cleft of the rock upon which Moses is standing so that he cannot see the glory of God as it passes by. Then when God has passed by, Moses shall only see God's back. I don't know if you find that a powerful visual image, but I sure do.

Here's three questions for the day:

How do we paint the face of God into our minds and hearts so that no matter what happens we don't forget that God is in charge, not us?

How are we aware of God in the worst of times and in the best of times?

How do we know that God is, indeed, with us when we are stuck in the cleft of the rock of our daily lives unable to free ourselves from the problems that confront us every day?

These are not easy questions to answer. But to try to answer them I want to draw from a sermon I delivered in 2002. Looking back over these twenty years, I find some chilling comparisons to where we are right now in this country, in the cleft of the rock where we find ourselves seemingly hidden from God more often than we would like.

I sat at my computer one Tuesday morning in 2002 reading the morning's news on the worldwide web. I read about the shooting at the Seven Corners' Shopping Center in Falls Church, Virginia the prior evening. My mother and I used to shop at Seven Corners when my parents lived about ten minutes from there in the 1970's. My brother and his family lived in Annapolis, Maryland at the time. My best friend from college, lived then and still lives in Arlington, Virginia. I know some of you have connections in Washington, D.C. and in the Maryland and Virginia suburbs of Washington.

That Tuesday morning it struck me for the first time in very real terms that the terrors of the world, that I usually only read about or heard about on National Public Radio, were getting closer and closer to home – my home, our home – with each day. I thought then, and it's even more real now, that as much as we might like to believe otherwise, we are not immune to the turmoil and chaos and dangers that are erupting in some new hot spot each day now in our country and around the world.

I wrote then, in 2002, and can affirm now in 2022, since September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, the question in theological terms has been, “Where is God in all of this?” Doesn’t it seem that God must surely be absent when thousands of people are killed in one fell swoop in a matter of minutes? Isn’t God absent when a crazed sniper shoots innocent children and unsuspecting shoppers.... now many more times since 2002?

My parishioners in 2002 struggled with these questions. We struggle with them now, in ever greater numbers. It's hard to wrap our minds around these horrific occurrences that seem to be happening more rapidly by the day, whether they relate to social unrest, political mayhem, or environmental catastrophes.

So what’s a pastor/preacher to say? How do I respond when someone asks me, “Susan, what’s going on? Why is all of this happening?” I often say I wish I had a magic wand I could wave, or I could snap my fingers and make all the problems we face every day go away. But I can’t.

I can only point in God’s direction and say in one way or another, “Have you been to the tent of meeting, as our sacred ancestors did?” Have you gone outside your home camp – the home camp in your head or in your heart or in your physical surroundings and talked to God? That conversation can be a hard one to have – especially when the world seems to be falling apart around us.

So what does all of this have to do with our text from Exodus for today? Just this – God cannot be pinned down, but is always available when we are paying attention to our faith. If we are willing to examine our own behaviors and stand up against vengeance, mean-spirited and stiff-necked people, God will show us the way to better days, even though they may seem very far away in time and distance.

If we recognize that no matter where terror takes place, it takes place in our own backyards and hearts, too, we will be less likely to turn our backs on our neighbors, even the neighbors we don’t believe we can ever understand or care about.

It has been suggested that the theme of “promise and fulfillment” is the overarching focus of the first five books of the Old Testament and specifically the Book of Exodus.<sup>[21]</sup> God promises – God promises individual people and groups of people that God will be present, even in the worst of times. And God fulfills – God fulfills even “stiff-necked” people who continue to go in the wrong direction with the wrong momentum.

Somehow God finds a way to walk with us today just as God walked with Moses almost 3,000 years ago – even when we are caught in the cleft of a rock unable to free ourselves from our own stiff-necked natures. God both shields us and hides from us in one fell swoop of a glorious hand.

Our questions for the day again:

How do we paint the face of God into our minds and hearts so that no matter what happens we don't forget that God is in charge, not us?

How are we aware of God in the worst of times and in the best of times?

And how do we know that God is, indeed, with us when we are stuck in the cleft of the rock of our daily lives unable to free ourselves from the problems that confront us every day?

Two answers to all of these questions:

Go to your tent of meeting with God every day, not just on Sunday mornings when we gather for worship.

And be involved in amazing events like yesterday's "yard sale" here in Leach Hall – an event where people of all stripes, coming from all ways and walks of life, carrying with them their biases and prejudices, their politics and personal beliefs, come together to hunt for treasures they didn't know they wanted or needed, all for a good cause – the building up of the body of Christ, the home of God in our midst.

Don't ever forget the promise, and expect the fulfillment, of God's forgiveness and love now and always.

Let the people say, "Amen."

**Federated Church in Thomaston**

**United Church of Christ United Methodist Church**

**All Are Welcome**

**Sunday, August 14, 2022**

Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet, Pastor Alice Billheimer, Organist/ Choir Director  
Lector: Arlene Woodman

*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** O Holy Father -- Friedrich Von Flotow

### **Call to Worship**

One: Here we are God, with our bits of faith and our pieces of hope.

Many: Here we are God, in our giving and taking moods. Will you be here with us as we talk, dream, listen, sing, and pray?

All: God, will you come and join us? Will you hold and comfort, push and poke us, speak to us, feed us? Let us worship God!

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

**A Time of Silence....**

## **SERVICE OF THE WORD**

**Scripture Reading** Exodus 33:1-11

**Responsive Reading** Exodus 33:12-23

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

**Message** "...in the cleft of the rock"

\***Hymn of Meditation** "Rock of Ages" #361 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** O Holy Father -- Friedrich Von Flotow

**\*Prayer of  
Dedication**

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

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

**\*Benediction**

**Postlude Built on the Rock -- (Ludwig M. Lindemann, arr by Roger Wilson)**

**Revised Common Lectionary Readings for Sunday, August 21, 2022**

**Guest Preacher: Rev. Dick Hanks**

**Jeremiah 1:4-10; Psalm Psalm 71:1-6; Hebrews 12:18-29; Luke 13:10-17**

**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.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Sunday-8/14/22.....10:30 am: Outreach Meeting  
Sunday-8/21/22.....9:30: Worship Service .....10:30 am: Coffee Time



Suggested Food Pantry  
Donation.....Peanut Butter

The flowers for the Alter this week are given by Pastor Susan and Nance Brown for their fathers, Keith "Dan" Daniels and E. Brinton West, both born in August.

Deacons for August, 2022: Jackie Harjula

Reminders for next Sunday, August 21, 2022:

Greeter/Usher: Arlene

Woodman

Coffee Host: Alice

Bilheimer

Lector: Janet

Dwelley

Flowers: Karen Wincapaw

Collection Total for

Sunday, 8/7/22:

Pledges - \$ 830.00

Loose

- \$ 7.00

Investment income (Dividend)

- \$ 81.00

Deacon's Sunday

- \$ 14.33

Collection total

- \$ 932.33

Ames' Rental

- \$1100.00

Total

- \$1341.00

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, August 14, 2022*

*Please feel free to contact Susan by phone (207)322-1948 or by email  
at [freerangepastor@gmail.com](mailto: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](mailto:freerangepastor@gmail.com)  
WiFi password is #1Church

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<sup>[1]</sup>Charles Edward Jefferson, *The Minister as Prophet*, New York: Thomas V. Crowell & Co. Publishers, 1905, p. 6-7.

<sup>[2]</sup>Marcus Borg, *Reading the Bible Again for the First Time, Taking the Bible Seriously but Not Literally*