

Good o’dark thirty morning from a cool hill in Rockport....

I woke up at 2 a.m. this morning, wide awake, and so got up to finish getting ready for this morning’s worship service. I keep going over in my mind a piece I read before going to bed last night about how the outpouring of loving commendations of Queen Elizabeth don’t mention all the less than wonderful events that have transpired over the centuries due to England’s conquests around the world. O.K., yes..... but in this moment of worldwide mourning over the passing of the Queen of England at the end of her seventy years of reigning can’t we take a moment to remember her sense of grace and civility, common sense and courtesy, and not the evils of her country’s actions? I am reminded that none of us are liked and respected by all of us. I am reminded that each one of us can demonstrate “the good” in our words and actions, and that each one of us can also demonstrate words and actions that ignite cynical words by our detractors and defiers. I know this because I am so aware of it in myself. Each of us have admirers and detractors. Each one of us are loved by some, and not by others. On this day of remembrance and mourning over the events of September 11, 2001, the death of the Queen of England, and the on-going struggles with violence and hatreds all around us, can’t we take a moment, or two, to focus on grace and civility, common sense and courtesy? I pray that we can....

I hope some of you reading these words will join me for worship in a few hours. We will focus on the “lost and found department” of God’s household.... a place we have all visited at one time or another, or many times, as we’ve trudged through this life of wows and woes, ups and downs, and so much more..... Blessings to each one this very early Sunday morn..... I think I’ll go back to bed for a little while..... Susan

“Lost and found”
A Sermon for the Federated Church in Thomaston
Thomaston, Maine
Sunday, September 11, 2022
Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet
Scripture: Luke 15:1-10

Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to Jesus. And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, “This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

So Jesus told them this parable: “Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.’ Just so, I

tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.’ Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

Luke

15:1-10

Will you pray with me. Shepherding God, we are lost much of the time. Some of us admit this reality and spend our lives trying to find you in the midst of emptiness and difficulties. Others of us do not believe they are lost, only distracted by too many responsibilities and too little time to seek you out. And still others think looking for you is a waste of time because you do not exist in their minds’ eye.

Give us all another chance to find you, O God – those of us who know we are lost and long to be found, those who think they are too busy to be lost and won’t take the time to be found, and those who don’t know even how to imagine being lost or found. Amen.

Well, today’s message is about God’s “lost and found department.” Luke’s telling of Jesus’ parable about the lost sheep is one of the better known stories in the New Testament. (put sheep on pulpit) Sheep figure prominently in Jesus’ ministry – probably because there were so many of them around then. They played such a big part in people’s lives – for food, for their wool, for the shepherds’ livelihood. People could identify with sheep in Jesus’ day in ways many of us find foreign or at least outside of our ordinary day-to-day activities.... except for those who raise sheep in Maine and elsewhere, that is!

In Jesus’ parable about the lost sheep, the one who has wandered away from the rest of the flock becomes the total focus of the shepherd. He hunts and hunts and hunts until he finds the one who has been lost. And when the lost one has been found, there is great rejoicing. The shepherd “comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.’” (Luke 15:6)

I don’t know about you, but I still find great comfort in this story today – in the long shadow of what happened on September 11, 2001, in the midst of the continuing political turmoil and violence in our country and around the world, in

the grief many people are feeling over the death of Queen Elizabeth just a few days ago, and even in the midst of our day-to-day life challenges. We may be lost, whether we admit it or not, but the Bible tells us that God longs to find us wherever we are, and whoever we are.

So here's the first question for today: What does it feel like to be lost? (get responses) To be lost is to feel alone, to be cut off from others, without resources, without a sense of God, with no sense of direction, with fear and doubt about what is to happen in the days and months to come.

Here's the second question of the day: What does it feel like to be found? (get responses) To be found is to feel at ease, safe, secure, protected, unafraid, knowing where to go, knowing that I do not go forward alone, feeling connected with others, knowing that God goes with me.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if every person in the world could feel that sense of "foundness," that sense of connection with all people under God, with liberty and justice for all? But, unfortunately and sadly, we know that isn't true. Too many people feel alone, lost, and like no one cares about them.

Jesus told the parables about the lost sheep and the lost coin to a group of religious officials who didn't believe it was right to associate with the "wrong kind of people." Jesus told them, and tells us, there are no wrong kind of people, only those who are lost, only those who sin – either knowingly or unknowingly, only those who struggle with the trials of life and wander – sometimes in search of help, sometimes not.

Here's a story. "The farmer came down the lane. 'Got a stray,' he said. 'How do they get lost?' asked the city man. 'The just nibble themselves lost,' said the farmer. 'They keep their heads down, wander from one green tuft to another, come to a hole in the fence and go through it – and never can find a hole by which to get back again.' The city man answered, 'Like people, like every generation of foolish people.'"^[1]

The greatest and major theme of the Bible is not about our love for God and for one another, as noble as those themes are. The greatest theme is about God's love and faith in us – no matter how foolish we are, no matter how many holes we go through as we wander into another's field.

No matter how bad we've been,
no matter how much we've sinned against God or our fellow humans,
no matter whether we turn to God or not when we feel lost,

no matter what – God turns to us and seeks us out. God searches for us the same way the shepherd in Jesus’ parable searches for one lost sheep and the woman searches for a lost silver coin. God’s persistence never ends. God’s love is available to all of us.

And sometimes *we* are called to step into action in God’s “lost and found department.” This happened to Nance and me this past Wednesday when we were in the mall in Portland. We’d just walked past Starbucks when this little girl – may two and a half – came running out of a clothing store giggling and wearing a hat with a price tag on it and a pair of sunglasses with a price tag on them. Those little legs moved so fast we couldn’t catch her. She was a regular whirlwind of action! The hat went flying and the sunglasses, too, as she whirled and ran and giggled!

When I picked up the hat and sunglasses I had a momentary thought that a store clerk might have thought I stole them! But at the same time another young woman walking through the mall was watching all of this flying around. When the little girl headed for an escalator and jumped on, the young woman – who was able to move much faster than either one of us could – jumped on, too, and was able to take a hold of the little girl about a third of the way up.

We searched for the little girl’s mother and couldn’t find her anywhere.... When the young woman and the little girl appeared coming down the down elevator, we still hadn’t found the mother. At this point the little girl was beginning to look not so happy.... And then, miraculously, her mother appeared, stroller in hand, coming out of the store where the child had first appeared.

Now, as we’ve thought about it, we’re not sure the mother and child spoke English, since neither one responded to us verbally. But we all heaved a sigh of relief that this little girl and her mother were reunited. It’s like this – every once in a while we are given the opportunity to see someone caught in the midst of being lost and found all at the same time. Sometimes we have to take a leap into the unknown and act to save another, to pull them back through the hole in the fence, to do whatever it takes to save one who is lost who doesn’t even know it.

After this little episode was safely over, we wondered what would have happened if no one had come to this little girl’s rescue when she got off that escalator going up and she couldn’t find her mother at the other end. You see.... God’s “lost and found department” comes in many different forms.

On this twenty-first anniversary of 9/11,

in the midst of continuing political dissention and violent behavior by too many in our country,

in the aftermath of the death of one of the great peacemakers of the world of the last seventy years,

can we step through the doors of God's "lost and found department" and acknowledge God's grace and protection for each one of us? No matter what escalator we might jump on with wild abandon, no matter what hole in a fence we might wander through, not knowing who will meet us in the end to save us, can we trust that we will be met with love? The *Bible* tells us *God* will meet us, no matter what....

Let the people say, "Amen."

Federated Church in Thomaston

United Church of Christ United Methodist Church

All Are Welcome

Sunday, September 11, 2022

Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet, Pastor Alice Billheimer, Organist/ Choir Director
Lector: Richard Kortright

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 Meditation -- Dimitri Bortniansky

Call to Worship

One: Whether we find ourselves surrounded by supportive relationships or we feel lost and alone, unsure of the way forward, love is never far away.

Many: Whether our faith is rock solid and we are filled with wisdom, or when we are mired in doubt and we just don't know, love is never far away.

All: All that we are – every circumstance and feeling – is welcomed by the Spirit into the heart of worship, where love is never far away. Let us worship God!

***Opening hymn “Sweet, Sweet Spirit” #334 Blue Hymnal (sing twice)**

A Time of Silence....

Responsive Reading “Salvation Oracles” (see insert)

SERVICE OF THE WORD

Scripture Reading Luke 15:1-10

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

Message “Lost and found”

***Hymn of Meditation “This Is My Song” #437 Blue Hymnal**

RESPONDING IN FAITH

Sharing Our Joys and Concerns with God and Each Other

Pastoral Prayer & The Lord’s Prayer.....

Offertory Contemplation – Alexandre Guilmant

**Prayer of
Dedication**

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

Flow

***Closing Hymn “Let There Be Peace on Earth” #431 Blue Hymnal**

Benediction

Postlude Te Deum Laudamus (We Praise Thee) --Stephen Otis

Revised Common Lectionary Readings for Sunday, September 18, 2022

Guest Preacher: Rev. Dick Hanks

Jeremiah 8:18-9:1; Psalm 79:1-9; 1 Timothy 2:1-7; Luke 16:1-13

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 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 for Amber Thomas.... And for James Armstrong and family....

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Tuesday-9/13/22.....7:00 pm: Thomaston Historical Society Meeting
Sunday-9/18/22.....9:30 am: Worship Service
.....10:30 am: Coffee Time

Suggested Food Pantry

Donation.....
...Tuna Fish

The flowers for the Alter this week are given by Karen Wincapaw.

Deacons for September, 2022: Corinne Ervin

Reminders for next Sunday, September 18, 2022:

Greeter/Usher: Kay Sylvester
Caron Lector:
Kinney
Hernandez

Sumner
Flowers: Frances

Coffee Host: Sandra

for Sunday, 9/4/22:

Pledges - \$2201.00

Loose

- \$ 35.00

Deacon's Sunday \$24.33

Collection Total

- \$2260.33

Total

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

Sunday, September 11, 2022

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

To contact the pastor via e-mail: freerangepastor@gmail.com

WiFi password is #1Church

^[1]In *The Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. 8, 1952, p. 265.