

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

“The most important skill in the kitchen – and, arguably, in life – is adaptability.” I read those words yesterday on the NYT Cooking site regarding the substitutions one can make to a recipe to make it more “adaptable” to certain needs or desires of the cook... as in, you can exchange olive oil for other kinds of oil in a recipe, or you can exchange milk and butter for heavy cream (but why would you want to? As Julia Child is known to have said, “You can take out the heavy cream if you want to.... but you’ll be sorry!”) JC and cooking ideas aside, adaptability is an important trait to have in these rocky times, don’t you think?

Adaptability – flexibility, versatility, ambidexterity, malleability, adjustability – lots of “ility’s” in getting along well in life. Yes? Yet some days (many days nowadays!) it doesn’t seem like we are very adaptable to much of anything or anyone who is different from us – be it because of religious differences, political differences, social differences. It’s a challenge to be adaptable to the needs, wants, desires of others that seem so different from our own. It is for me, so I have to believe it is for those of you who have chosen to read these words. Yet, we have to keep trying, don’t we?

In my sermon this morning, based on Luke 18:1-8 about the parable of the persistent widow, we learn both she and the “unjust judge” become adaptable to the other – in different ways, of course – but still they both adapt, she in her defiance of her lowly status as a widow back then, and he in his giving in to her demand for justice. How does their adaptability illustrate for us how we are to adapt to one another today? It’s a sticky, and sometimes annoying, challenge, isn’t it?

Blessings to each one this early October morn.... Join me for church if you can.... in person this morning.... I’ll try to get my sermon out on my Facebook page, freerangepastor, and on the church’s Facebook page, the Federated Church of Thomaston, later today..... Susan

***“....not to lose heart”***  
**A Sermon for the Federated Church of Thomaston**  
**Thomaston, Maine**  
**Sunday, October 16, 2022**  
**Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet**  
**Scripture: Luke 18:1-8**

Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart. He said, “In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had

respect for people. In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, ‘Grant me justice against my opponent.’ For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, ‘Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.’”

And the Lord said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry out to him day and night? Will he delay in helping them? I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?”

L

uke 18:1-8

Will you pray with me. God of justice and mercy help us to learn in the coming moments of the importance of persistence in our prayers and of not losing heart in difficult times. Help us to understand what it means to have your law written on our hearts. Amen.

It has been said that “spiritual growth is a long process that requires perseverance and patience. Once the resolution is made and the journey is begun, it should not be abandoned, for the result is often not decided until the very end. Patience is not merely to wait for fate to intervene; rather it means to persevere in the practices of the discipline until the goal is achieved.”<sup>[1]</sup>

The persistent widow in Jesus’ parable for today did not merely wait for fate to rule in her favor. She did not merely say her prayers and hope for the best. She kept coming to the unjust judge again and again until she wore him down. He granted her justice, not because of his sense of fairness or kind heartedness or concern for her welfare as a poor widow, but because she was a bother to him.

Do you like being a bother? I don’t. I hate to bother people. I think that’s why I wasn’t very good in sales work – because in sales you’re never supposed to take the first “no” for an answer. In fact, I think the studies of selling behavior suggest that you don’t give up on a sale until the client or customer has said “no” at least six or seven times. I could never get past the first “no.” I didn’t want to be a bother. It’s amazing I lasted in sales work for American Express for almost fifteen years! Maybe if I’d known about the parable of the unjust judge and the persistent widow back then, I would have been a better sales person! But that was years before I went to seminary and before I “got religion.”

But growing in one’s faith IS an active, on-going process. And at times I think it IS a selling job. Jesus, we could say, was a master salesman. He never

gave up on trying to get his message across – he used parables and miracles and stories and teachings and examples to get people to come to their spiritual senses and to realize that faith is not just a matter of believing – it is a matter of doing – doing for others, doing for God, doing for just, doing for love. It’s not something that happens by waiting. We have to DO something in order for our faith to be strengthened – especially in times when faith seems so hard to keep – like in the past few years.... in our country and around the world.

Our passage from Luke says that “Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart.” (Luke 18:1) What does it mean to lose heart? Does it mean to give up hope? Or to quit too soon? Or to lose one’s interest or drive or passion? Does it mean to not care anymore, to become “burned out,” as we say now, or numb to spirit and action? How does the parable about the persistent widow help us to understand the importance of not losing heart?

A little background here to frame this text from Luke – “Widows in Jesus’ time were not just women grieving their dead spouses; they were uneducated outcasts, bereft of name, land, wealth and recognition. They were not seen as productive or important members of society; in fact, they often were denied even basic membership in society, [pushed] to the edges of civilization along with orphans, the homeless and those with contagious diseases.

In this context the widow’s success before the judge [in this parable] takes on surprising significance: Here is this invisible person – not just a woman, but a woman who lost her husband and with him nearly everything she once had – obtaining justice in a legal dispute. More than merely an [example of the power of] prayer, these words of Jesus offer the presence and grace of God to the most invisible and destitute and despised [in society]. [His words offer] justice for those who least expect it.”<sup>[2]</sup>

How does the persistent widow teach us about not losing heart? She helps us to understand that not even the greatest hardship, the most devastating loss, or the worst catastrophe can separate us from the love of God and God’s ultimate justice – BUT we have to be persistent in our faith and our prayers and we must not lose heart.

I know I’m not the only one who has had a hard time taking in all the events and news of the past few years and staying optimistic about our future here in our country and beyond our borders – whether the cause has been the covid nightmare, or political fighting or social unrest – it’s been hard to stay upbeat, hopeful, energized. But every once in a while.... either in being reminded of the

importance of persistence from a biblical text, or because of something I've heard or read or experienced, I find a renewed sense of faith again and again.

In preparing this sermon I reminded myself of an interview I heard on NPR some years ago that was done with George Mitchell. I'm sure most of you know he is the former Maine Senator to the United States Congress who chaired the Northern Ireland peace talks during the Clinton administration and headed the international panel that examined the Israeli-Palestinian conflict some years ago. He was, in this interview, giving his understanding and opinions regarding the situation in our country at that time. This was after the 9/11 tragedy of 2001.

It was a fascinating and enlightening interview to me. But what was most helpful to me was not Mitchell's words about his understanding of what was going on in the world at that time, but his answer to the interviewer's final question. She asked, "Mr. Mitchell, how do you keep your hope through all of this?" In essence, she was asking the question, "How do you not lose heart in all of your work when there seem to be no good resolutions and no peace at hand or even in the future in all of these areas of conflict?"

He gave her three answers – two of which I can't seem to remember – but the third one I do remember. He said, "I have a natural sense of optimism." He talked about the fact that his parents were immigrants with little education, and that he had had little support while he was growing up and had no advantages or extra help. But in spite of all that, he managed to be elected to the national level of our governmental system in the face of great personal odds.

He talked about the fact that decisions have been made by this country in times of war that could be changed when the war was over. During World War II the United States demanded nothing less than unconditional surrender from the enemy, but after the war, the United States was willing to bend over backwards to help other, even former enemies, to rebuild and start over. And Mitchell said that was what we needed to have happen again. Nothing less than unconditional surrender from the enemy, but then the time of rebuilding and starting over would come.

"A natural sense of optimism" kept George Mitchell going then. I don't know about now. I believe he is still alive and was diagnosed with leukemia in 2020. But remembering this interview with him some years ago, reminds me now of MY natural sense of optimism. I just forget it some days. I "lose heart" for a bit. And when one loses heart, everything looks bleak. When one loses heart, faith is hard to keep.

There is a saying from the Islamic tradition that goes, “There is a polish for everything that becomes rusty, and the polish for the heart is the remembrance of God.”<sup>[3]</sup> Is that so different from the words of the 51<sup>st</sup> Psalm that we read together this morning, “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.” (Psalm 51:10)

The persistent widow in Jesus’ parable has a natural sense of optimism in the face of the greatest odds. She has a heart polished by her remembrance of a just God. She has a clean heart, with a new and right spirit. The persistent widow teaches US not to lose heart even in the worst and most unjust of times. Don’t lose heart – for God’s law is written upon it.

Let the people say, “Amen.”

**Federated Church in Thomaston**  
**United Church of Christ United Methodist Church**  
**All Are Welcome**  
**Sunday, October 16, 2022**

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

**Prelude** I Need Thee Every Hour - Robert Lowry, arr by Robert Hughes

### Call to Worship

Leader: Deep in our hearts, O God, we are known by you.

**People: Every crevice of our past, every heartbeat of our present, is known and loved by you.**

**All: Inscribe in us the desire to know you, too, and knowing you, may we live more fully as your people. Let us worship God!**

**\*Opening Hymn** “Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise” #103 Blue Hymnal

**A Moment of Silence**

**Responsive Reading** Psalm 51:6-12 (see insert)

### **SERVICE OF THE WORD**

**Scripture Reading** Luke 18:1-8

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

**Message** “...and not to lose heart” Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet

**\*Hymn of Meditation** “Go Forth for God” #670 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** Autumn Melody- John Field

**\*Prayer of Dedication**

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

**\*Closing Hymn** “God Be with You till We Meet Again” #672 Blue Hymnal

**Benediction**

**Postlude** Open Now thy Gates of Beauty -- Edward Broughton

**Revised Common Lectionary Readings for Sunday, October 23, 2022**  
**Joel 2:23-32; Psalm 65; 2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18; Luke 18:9-14**

**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 living through the aftermath of Hurricane Ian....

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...And Dale O’Neal (Kristen O’Neal’s husband who has tonsil cancer). And Jeffrey Northgraves who is receiving treatment for lung cancer.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Thursday-10/20/22...BRING YOUR OWN LUNCH..10:00 am: Federated Church Women Meeting  
Sunday-10/23/22.....9:30 am: Worship Service  
.....10:30 am: Church Council Meeting

Suggested Food Pantry Donation.....Jello

The flowers for the Alter this week are given by Sandra Caron, “goodbye to the HOT DAYS OF SUMMER”.

Reminders for next Sunday, 10/23/22  
Greeter/Usher: Kathleen Anderson  
Coffee Host:  
Lector:  
Flowers: Laci DeVarney

Collection Total for Sunday, October 9, 2022:  
Pledges - \$346.00  
Loose - \$605.00 includes a Family donation of \$500.00 for Susan's presiding at a funeral service.  
Total - \$951.00  
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, October 16, 2022*

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

To contact the pastor via e-mail: [freerangepastor@gmail.com](mailto:freerangepastor@gmail.com)

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[1]In *World Scripture, A Comparative Anthology of Sacred Texts*, A Project of the International Religious Foundation, 1991, p. 529.

[2]In *Homily Service*, Vol 34, No. 7, October 2001, p. 30.

[3]*World Scripture*, p. 594.