

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

We took a train trip to Boston this past week – just an overnight trip – to hear Brandi Carlile at the TD Garden arena. Brandi Carlile was great, but the best part of the 24 hours to me was the train ride down and back between Brunswick and North Station in Boston. We hadn’t taken a train trip since January of 2020, right before the great lockdown came for us all in March of 2020. I’d forgotten how much I appreciate the wonders of train travel!

We have a painting of a train on a track in the dark hanging in our living room. It was painted by my friend and fine painter, Alison Rector, who lives in Monroe. Alison’s painting and our train trips back and forth to Boston remind me of the wonder of travel in this old fashioned and new fashioned way – letting someone else do the driving so to enjoy the scenes that fly by without having to concentrate on driving, being carried along with one’s thoughts without the interruptions of my “to do lists,” chores to be attended to around the house, etc. Yes, some of these wonders can occur in flying travels, but it’s just not the same as traveling by train.

It’s the step out of time that occurs while sitting in one’s seat in a train coach that happens. It’s the assurance that someone else is doing the driving so I don’t have to worry about others choosing to drive faster than I would like. It’s the memory of the stories my mother would tell me about her and her mother taking train trips when my mother was a little girl. She and her little Toy Poodle, “Snookie,” loved those train trips. Every time my grandmother got out Snookie’s little travel bag, my mother and Snookie would get excited. And so, I love train trips.... just as my mother and Snookie loved them....

In the midst of so much that is awry in our world – in too many places, in too many political signs, in too many harsh and meanspirited words, in just too much noise of angry humanity, it is a relief to take a brief pause and take a train ride. How do you take pauses in the midst of all that is awry in our world right now? I encourage you to seek out what brings you calm and good memories in these hard times....

Blessings, Susan

p.s. I will hope to send out this morning’s sermon via my Facebook page, freerangepastor, and the church’s Facebook page, federated church of Thomaston, later today.....

p.s.s. Next Sunday, October 30<sup>th</sup>, Rev. Marti Garrison will take to our pulpit while I take my one-Sunday-a-month away from the pulpit. Thanks, Marti!

**“to some who trusted in themselves...”**  
**A Sermon for the Federated Church in Thomaston**  
**Thomastor, Maine**  
**Sunday, October 23, 2022**  
**Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet**  
**Scripture: Luke 18:9-14**

[Jesus] also told this parable **to some who trusted in themselves** that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.’ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.” Luke 18:9-14

Will you pray with me. Patient God, you call us to humility and ask us to recognize our sins for what they are. Help us to look to YOU for affirmation rather than to OURSELVES. Help us to see your wisdom shining through the parables of Jesus. Amen.

How do we enter God’s kingdom? That is a question for today. In the Gospel of Luke in Chapter 18:9 through Chapter 19:10, we read of five examples of how one enters God’s kingdom.

First, it is the one who admits they are a sinner (vv. 9-14), our text for today.

Second, it is the one who comes in childlike faith (vv. 15-17).

Third, it is the one who gives up all (vv. 18-30).

Fourth, it is the one who cries out in faith for help (vv. 35-43). Fifth, it is the one who joyfully makes restitution for their sin (19:1-10).

To review – admission of sin, childlike faith, giving up one’s possessions, asking for help by profession of faith, and settling up for one’s sin with joy – any or all of these behaviors – according to Luke and Jesus – will get you into the kingdom of God!

We’re not going to focus on all five of those entrance exam questions into God’s kingdom today – I know you want to get home before noon! We’re going to focus on the first way this morning – by admitting our sins.

O.K., here's the question for today – In our passage from Luke, who are you – the high and mighty Pharisee, who thinks he's pretty special, or the lowly, despised tax collector, who's full of remorse for his behavior? Neither character is particularly flattering, are they?

The original context of this parable is important. We have to remember who the two characters in the parable represent. “Pharisees [in Jesus' day] were devoted to God and showed that devotion through study and keeping the Torah [that's Jewish law – the first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures, what we know as the Old Testament]. Pharisees were respected and revered.

Tax collectors, on the other hand, were employed by the occupying Roman military to collect land and poll taxes. They paid for the right to collect the taxes and could charge more than the tax to make a profit for themselves. Tax collectors were considered collaborators with the Roman oppressors and therefore people feared and despised them.

In the parable, the Pharisee has kept the Law and is therefore righteous [in his own eyes]. Knowing that many in his own society are not so fortunate, he gives thanks that he has been born into a position that allows him to keep the Law. “*God, I thank you that I am not like other people....*” (Lk 18:11) [But he doesn't ask God for anything in his prayer.]

The tax collector knows himself [to be] a sinner, perhaps because of his [working in cahoots] with the Romans or his profiteering. [He doesn't give thanks in his prayer, nor does he tell God what he's done to prove his worthiness,] he only asks God for mercy. “*God, be merciful to me, a sinner!*” (Lk 18:13)<sup>[1]</sup>

In this parable we are given the age-old, but always contemporary story of how we are welcomed into God's grace and care. Is it by what we *do*, or by who we *confess that we are*, that brings us before God? And does this parable suggest that **DOING** is not so important for a person of faith, but **CONFESSING** is very important!

Yet it's not the *doing* that gets the Pharisee in trouble with God. It's the *self-congratulations* and the pointing of the finger at others that gets Jesus all riled up. “*I tell you [Jesus says] this man [the tax collector] went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.*” (Lk 18:14)

Jesus didn't care for self-important people, whether they were Pharisees or others. He called people to come before God in humility and willing to admit their

sinfulness and their need for help. Many of us tend to not care for self-important people either!

So back to my original question -- who are you – the high and mighty Pharisee, who thinks he’s pretty special, or the lowly, despised tax collector, who’s full of remorse for his behavior?

Of course, if we see ourselves as the Pharisee, we’re the ones who goes to church, plunk down something in the offering plates, help out with various church events, volunteer for committees and church offices, and for sure read our Bible religiously. *Of course*, we’ve been good and we deserve a break today, maybe even a “pass” from God so we don’t have to do anything particularly “churchy” in the coming week or month. We’ve paid your dues, haven’t we? By God! For God!

I can say, and I have said to myself in the past, I’ve paid my dues and made *extra* contributions to worthy causes, but I really do hope our Treasurer assures me that I will get that tax deduction for them so I won’t have to pay so many taxes this year.

I’ve gone to church, participated in church activities, but I really can’t stand “so and so,” and it really irks me that I’ve put in all this time working for the church, and they haven’t... the jerks...

O.K., I’ve maybe seen myself as the Pharisee in this parable, but I’m really better than that... so I say to myself... I have to tell you, I really am thinking of *myself* in these instances... not any one of you....

But maybe, just maybe... we see ourselves as the despised tax collector... the ones who have not exactly cheated on our taxes, but have certainly pushed the envelope a little in some deductions.

Maybe we’ve cut some corners in our relationships, or not been particularly honest in our dealings with all others.

Maybe we’ve been downright mean to someone or many someone’s and been happy about it, if not downright proud of it – they deserved it, didn’t they?

But finally, we beginning to feel guilty about all of it – the cheating in one or many ways, the evil thoughts we’ve had about another, the regrets for things said and not said in too many situations to too many people. We’re sorry... Will God, will anybody... ever forgive us?

I think this parable is a set up – as so many of them are. It’s easy to find a cut and dried moral to the story. In the parable for today, I believe it’s this – if you think you’re high and mighty and worthy of God’s special attention, you’re *not*; if

you realize you've not lived as you should have and you're filled with remorse, you *will* receive God's special attention in spite of yourself. End of parable. That's the moral of the story. Period.

But I don't think it *is* the end of the story. There's more. There's another side to the story. Not all Pharisee-like people are self-righteous son of a guns. Not all tax collector-like people are despicable, money grabbing crooks. I'm convinced there's a little of both in each one of us.

We have the potential to be rotten, self-centered, not very considerate of others, only thinking about ourselves – full of hubris. *And* we have the potential to be good, generous, kind, compassionate, caring individuals. We can be faith “full of ourselves,” or faith filled with care for others. The choice is ours. And sometimes, in spite of ourselves, we're both.

The more I read the Scriptures, in particular the writings about Jesus, I have come to think he knew his hearers, his opponents, his disciples, his detractors, and his supporters better than they could ever know themselves or him. I believe he, or whoever wrote in his name, was brilliant – because they were able to take a kaleidoscope of human nature and turn it in ways so as to see all our frailties and faults as well as all our good points and fine gestures. They molded us into a story worthy of more than two thousand years of reflection and writing.

The Bible simply, it seems to me, IS “the greatest story ever told.” Its greatness lies in its universality and its mirroring of all the riches and rags of the human family, the creation of a God who somehow thought it would be a good idea to give us the potential for good and evil, joy and sorrow, forgiveness and regret, love and loss.

The Statement of Faith of the United Church of Christ, which we read as our Responsive Reading today, states of God, “You call us into your church to accept the cost and joy of discipleship, to be your servants in the service of others, to proclaim the gospel to all the world and resist the powers of evil, to share in Christ's baptism and eat at his table, to join him in his passion and victory. You promise to all who trust you forgiveness of sins and fullness of grace, courage in the struggle for justice and peace, your presence in trial and rejoicing, and eternal life in your realm which has no end.”

It's all there – cost and joy, servers and receivers of the servanthood of Jesus, servers at Christ's banquet and guests at his table. We are granted forgiveness for our sins and courage as we attest and attend to the struggle for

justice and peace for others. Trial and rejoicing, eternal life – now, here.... *and* there when there is no end.

The parables of Jesus, and in particular the parable for today, invite all of us into the circle of Jesus' wisdom and the mixed up and often clueless family of his followers. We are all saints and sinners, Pharisees and tax collectors.

Perhaps the most important difference between the Pharisee and the tax collector is that the Pharisee TELLS God what he has done for God, while the tax collector ASKS God for mercy when he has done nothing but sin. How do we enter God's kingdom? Don't *tell* of your goodness, just *ask* for mercy.

Let the people say, "Amen."

**Federated Church in Thomaston  
United Church of Christ United Methodist Church  
All Are Welcome  
Sunday, October 23, 2022**

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

*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** Ave Maria -- Jacob Arcadelt (Using a 16th Century melody)

**Call to Worship**

Leader: We are called to God's house, a dwelling place for all people!

**People:** By your awesome deeds, O God, you call us into beauty and reverence.

**All:** By your abundance, you remind us of your grace. Let us worship God!

**\*Opening Hymn** "O Word of God Incarnate" #598 Blue Hymnal

**A Moment of Silence**

**Responsive Reading** The Statement of Faith of the United Church of Christ (see insert)

## **SERVICE OF THE WORD**

**Scripture Reading** Luke 18:9-14

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

**Message** “to some who trusted in themselves” Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet

**\*Hymn of Meditation** “Lord, Speak to Me” #463 Blue Hymnal (v. 1-3)

## **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** Just a Closer Walk with Thee (based on a traditional hymn tune)

**\*Prayer of Dedication**

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

**\*Closing Hymn** “Lord, Speak to Me” #463 Blue Hymnal (v. 4-5)

**Benediction**

**Postlude** Triumphal March -- Theodore Dubois, arr by George Blake

**Revised Common Lectionary Readings for Sunday, October 30, 2022**

**Guest Preacher – Rev. Marti Garrison**

**Habakkuk 1:1-4, 2:1-4; Psalm 119:137-144;**

**2 Thessalonians 1:1-4, 11-12; Luke 19:1-10**

*“Parables are like fishing lures: they are full of attractive features – feathers, bright colors – and they end with a sharp little barb!*

*The parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector is just such a parable...*”

~ Marjorie Proctor-Smith, *Feasting on the Word*, Year C, Vol.

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**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 dealing with the ravages of cancer near and far..... 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**

Sunday-10/30/22.....9:30

am: Worship Service

Suggested Food Pantry

Donation.....Peanut Butter

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

Reminders for next Sunday, 10/30/22

Greeter/Usher: Kathleen

Anderson

Coffee

Host:

Lector: Richard Kortright



Flowers:

Collection Total for Sunday, October 16, 2022:

Pledges - \$370.00

Loose

- \$ 74.00

Total - \$444.00

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 23, 2022*

**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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[1] Drawn from *The Whole People of God, Weekly Worship Resources for October 28, 2001*, p. 21.