

“Sunday Words” for October 24, 2021

Good brisk morning from a dark hill in Rockport.....

I’ve been thinking about definition this past week.... as in trying to answer the question, “What defines you?” What DOES define you? If you could put a paragraph around yourself and convey it to someone else, what words would you use to define yourself? I’m working on writing my own paragraph.... Perhaps that’s what living is all about – trying to define ourselves TO ourselves, and to everyone around us in the most descriptive, the most accurate ways.

“To define something, you show, describe, or state clearly what it is and what its limits are, or what it is like. To define is to explain or identify the nature or essential qualities [of some thing or person].” (from iPhone Dictionary) I’m thinking that if we spent more time trying to define ourselves *to* ourselves, we would have more success in our communications *with* one another! Maybe we would more clearly understand our underlying -- our essential -- motives, needs, desires, and hopes.... if we spent a little more time trying to define ourselves to ourselves!

“Where ARE you going with this, Susan?!?” I’m going to our text for this morning – Mark 10:46-52. It’s about blind beggar, Bartimaeus. Now there’s a man who was defined *by others* as a “blind beggar.” But the text tells us he didn’t define himself as a blind beggar.... He defined himself as a man seeking sight, seeking a new way to see himself as a man of faith, a follower of this fellow Jesus who seemed to have a miraculous power to heal those who were broken in some way – either by poor health, or unfortunate circumstances, or relational difficulties.

Jesus asks the man what he wants him (Jesus) to do for him (a blind beggar). Bartimaeus responds, “My teacher, let me see again.” Jesus responds, “Go, your faith has made you well.” The blind beggar regains his sight and follows Jesus “on the way.” It sounds too simple, doesn’t it? It’s a made up story, right? Healing is not that easy, right?

Maybe how we *define* ourselves determines how we will be healed, or not.... as we live through all the tragedies and challenges of life. Bartimaeus didn’t define himself as a “blind beggar,” but as a seeker of sight, with his eyes *and* with his faith. Call it “blind faith,” if you will, but what a description of definition of one’s self! Can you, or do you, define yourself as a “seeker of sight”? Think about that this chilly October day.....

Blessings to each one..... hoping to see some of you in church this morning..... Susan

p.s. I was going to have the text from the Book of Job in which Job responds to God as our focus for today, but somehow Bartimaeus was “shouting out” to me for attention. We’ll read the text from the Book of Job as our responsive reading in our service this morning.

“Go, your faith has made you well.”

A Sermon for the Federated Church of Thomaston

Thomaston, Maine

Sunday, October 24, 2021

Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet

Scripture: Mark 10:46-52

They came to Jericho. As he [Jesus] and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” Jesus stood still and said, “Call him here.” And they called the blind man, saying to him, “Take heart; get up, he is calling you.” So throwing off his cloak he sprang up and came to Jesus. Then Jesus said to him, “What do you want me to do for you?” The blind man said to him, “My teacher, let me see again.” Jesus said to him, “**Go, your faith has made you well.**” Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

Mark 10:46-52

Will you pray with me. Sight offering God, we confess that we are blind to you in our lives... sometimes... especially when the days are hard and we do not know which way to turn or how to deal with the events going on around us. Other times we believe we can see perfectly well and have no need of your assistance as we strut along feeling in control of our lives and our immediate circumstances. Help us to know we need your glasses of faith and courage, O God, rather than our own dark glasses that distort you and your people and your creation before us this day. Amen.

Blindness – it comes in many forms, doesn't it? If I take off my reading glasses (remove glasses), I can see all of you just fine, since my cataract surgery last year! But the words on this page I'm working from are fuzzy and not very readable. Such is the physical blindness that comes from growing older when one's eyes are not nearly so sharp and clear as they once were.

When we experience this kind of blindness, our immediate tangible world takes on a whole different level of meaning and availability. Without these glasses, my close up world is blurred physically and thus less available to me mentally.

Then there's the blindness that results from not having enough information or education, so that our INsight into what goes on around us is clouded and inaccurate and perhaps downright misguided....

This kind of blindness can affect how we see, or rather understand, many things – social issues, religion in general or in particular, politics, or world events. Such intellectual blindness can lead to a lot of ignorance and darkness in our individual relationships with one another, in our community and church

groups, in our government, and in our worldwide relations with those whom we believe are very different from us.

When we experience this kind of blindness, poor decisions are made, groups of people are divided, and individual people are hurt in many ways. Thus we find ourselves in the midst of a very negative, exclusive kind of “blind faith,” “blind politics,” “blind awareness” of the needs of others. Without glasses of some positive, inclusive kind, we are, and become more so every day, “the blind leading the blind,” and pretty soon we’re all hurting inside and hurting one another outside.

Then there’s the blindness that comes from not seeing, or refusing to see, or resisting seeing the role of faith in one’s life. I thought I didn’t need that “religion stuff” in the first half of my life. I was doing just fine – my eyes were clear in body, and in mind, and I thought I was completely in control of my life. No need of that faith mumbo jumbo for me! Only people who are weak and stupid need religion.... I thought.... I thought *other* people were blind... not me.... I thought they were blinded by their irrational superstitious religious beliefs that prevented them from seeing what the “real world” is all about. I didn’t need glasses of any sort... back then.... As I look back now, I think I was just too blind to know I was blind!

Then there’s Bartimaeus, in our story for today from the Gospel of Mark. We don’t know much about Bartimaeus beyond the fact that he was “the son of Timaeus,” and a “blind beggar.” (Mk 10:46) This is the only time in the Bible that we read of Bartimaeus or of his father Timaeus.

We don’t know if Bartimaeus was born blind, or if he was injured at some point in his life that caused him to go blind. We don’t know if he was a beggar because of his blindness or because he came from a long line of beggars in his family. All we know is he was sitting by the side of the road when Jesus came by, and that he must have had some knowledge of Jesus and of his power to heal people through miraculous actions – otherwise why would he shout out and say, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” (Mk 10:47-48)

Bartimaeus may have been physically blind, but it seems he was spiritually sighted, or at least *willing* to be spiritually sighted. Maybe that’s what it takes sometimes to become spiritually sighted –

a *physical ailment* – like blindness or some life threatening disease that limits one’s capacity to feel fully in control of their life;

an *event or situation* in one's life – like the death of a loved one or the unexpected ending of a relationship that limits their capacity to remain fully in control of their life;

or a *general malaise* or sense that something is missing from one's life that limits their enjoyment or satisfaction with much of anything, no matter how many tangible luxuries they own.

“Something” lead blind beggar Bartimaeus to shout out to Jesus, “Have mercy on me!” Was it his physical blindness, or his weariness from being a beggar for so long, or his deep longing to recognize and be willing to receive the gift of healing from beyond his immediate world of darkness?

I have a theory about how we deal with tragedy and hardship. Some people who have experienced and continue to experience deep tragedy or hardship in their lives are among the most joyful people I know.... while others who have experienced deep tragedy or hardship are blinded by their hardships, and become members of the “WOM family.” That’s the “world owes me family.” There is no joy in them, and whatever happens bad to them is always someone else’s fault.

Why is it that some people who have experienced tragedy or hardship of any kind have the willingness and the ability to call on their faith to sustain them, while others refuse to call on anyone or anything beyond themselves? Instead, they just complain about their problems and see themselves as victims. Any ideas as to why this is so? (get responses)

It seems to me we are all born with a spark of something within us. That spark either bursts into a flame of resilience and hope and faith at some point or many points along the way, or that smolders within us and keeps us from seeing the light of day, the light of hope and faith that shines right there in front of us.

If only... if only we take off our dark glasses of doubt and fear, and put on glasses of trust in what we can never truly understand but can always receive openly. If only.... Some can do it – Bartimaeus for one.... Others never seem to be able to do it...

We sang “Amazing Grace” last Sunday. Most of us know the story behind the hymn “Amazing Grace.” “Once I was blind, but now I see...” says the hymn writer, who was a slave owner before he became a man freed of his own slaving thoughts.

So often, it takes an illness or physical disability, a loss or a tragedy of some kind, a thirst that cannot seem to be quenched, a longing for something beyond us to restore our sight, to let us be open to the power of faith in our midst.

“Once I was blind, but now I see...” It was there all along... I know that now.... I was just too blind to see it before.

“Go, your faith has made you well,” Jesus says to blind Bartimaeus who miraculously could see after his conversation with Jesus. (Mk 10:52)

May our faith make us well, too.... Let the people say, “Amen.”

Federated Church in Thomaston
United Church of Christ United Methodist Church
All Are Welcome
Sunday, October 24, 2021

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

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 Hail, O Christ -- Edvard Grieg

Call to Worship

Leader: Source of goodness we long to see your face and hear you call our name.

People: We covet your grace and are eager to follow the way of Jesus.

All: Meet us in our deepest needs and call us forth to journey with you and with one another. Let us worship God! Amen.

***Opening Hymn** “O Grant Us Light” 48 Red Hymnal

A Responsive Reading Job 42:1-8, 10-17 (see insert)

A Moment of Silence

SERVICE OF THE WORD

Scripture Reading Mark 10:46-52

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

Message "Go, your faith has made you well" Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet

***Hymn of Meditation** "My Shepherd Will Supply My Need" 279 Red 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 Holy Spirit, Truth Divine. -- based on the hymn tune "Mercy" by Louis Moreau Gottschalk

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

***Prayer of Dedication**

***Closing Hymn** "Open My Eyes, That I May See" 454 Blue Hymnal

Benediction

Postlude Finale -- From "A Song of Praise" by Felix Mendelssohn

Revised Common Lectionary Readings for Sunday, October 31, 2021

Ruth 1:1-18; Psalm 146; Hebrews 9:11-14; Mark 12:28-34

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 add a prayer for Frances Hernandez, recovering from brain surgery, Tammy Whirly, a friend of Margie's, dealing with cancer challenges, and, from Jackie a request for prayers for Kyle Cloudier, continued prayers for Ursula recovering...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 and improving!**; Enid, Ann Foster,

Carol Moss, Fred Bagnall, Harriet Williams, Julie Pollitt, Zeke Bryant, Helmut Steger, John Flaherty, BJ Thomson, Heather Van Buskirk, **and continued deep prayers for Lucy as Hank has come to the end of his cancer journey**, and for Tiffany, Lucy's granddaughter, and for Sally Harjula's family, since her death two weeks ago..... and for all who knew Mimi's "Uncle Doug" who died after a major stroke two days ago....

Please feel free to contact Susan by phone (207)322-1948 or by email freerangepastor@gmail.com to add or drop the 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!

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Monday-10/25/21.....6:30 pm: Troop Meeting

Sunday-10/31/21.....9:30 am: Worship Service10:30 am: Halloween Time- Please join us

Suggested Food Pantry Donation..... Pasta

The flowers this week are given by Mimi and Gerry Zwick in honor of their upcoming anniversary.

Reminders for next Sunday, 10/31/21

Greeter/Usher: Kathleen Anderson
Host: Coffee

Lector: Dave Billheimer
Carey Flowers: Lucy

Collection Total for Sunday, October 17, 2021:

Pledges -	\$543.00
Loose -	\$ 88.00
Total -	\$631.00

The 2021 weekly budgeted operating cost for the Church and parsonage is \$1623.00 per week.

“The only thing worse than being blind is having sight but no vision.”

Helen Keller, 20th century