

Good RAINY morning from a hill in Rockport!

The newest member of our family, little “Roo,” a Toy Poodle we’ve nicknamed “Tiny Dancer” for the way he sounds when he struts across the wooden floors in our house, would NOT go outside at his usual time, 4 a.m., this morning! It’s a stormy Halloween so far.... I remember several years ago we had twelve inches of snow on Halloween! Now *that* was a Halloween to remember!!! So what will we remember about this Halloween, October 31, 2021?

It’s the second October with covid, mask madness and associated mayhem in our midst. It’s the day – in recognition of All Saints Day tomorrow – we think about those we’ve recently lost, Hank Carey and Harriet Williams, to name two, and those we’ve lost long ago. Who are the saints who have taught you the most in your life? Did you learn from their words or their actions or their very being?

A saint is “any of certain persons of exceptional holiness of life, formally recognized as such by the Christian Church, especially by canonization, OR a person of great holiness, virtue, or benevolence.” (iPhone Dictionary)

Matthew Henry, 1662-1714, wrote, “The Scriptures were written, not to make us astronomers, but to make us saints.” Henry was a beloved commentator on the Scriptures, a prolific writer and minister, most famous for his six volume *Commentary on the Whole Bible*. Think about that quote today.... Perhaps we are meant not to look up, but to look within to find the saint hidden within our very bones, within each one of us this day....

There is the promise of flooding in our midst over the next couple of hours.... Join me in church if you can, but don’t cross any flooded roadways to try to get there, o.k.? I’ll post my sermon on Facebook later today..... Blessings to each one this stormy morning.... Susan

“a new heaven and a new earth”
A Sermon for the Federated Church of Thomaston
Thomaston, Maine
Sunday, October 31, 2021
Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet
Scripture: Revelation 21:1-6a

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new

Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

“See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes.

Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.”

And the one who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.” Then he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.”

Revelation 21:1-6a

Will you pray with me. God of first beginnings, and last things, we ponder the end of all things this day. We ponder *our* endings... some *wondering* when they will happen... others *fearing* when they will happen and how they will happen, and still others *looking forward* to their endings. Help us to be at home in your household of faith this day, O God, on All Hallows Eve, Halloween, no matter our wonderings about, our fears toward, or our eagerness for what lies ahead. Amen.

Have you ever had a dream that was so real that when you woke up it took you literally minutes to realize you were dreaming and that what took place in your dream didn't really happen? I had that happen one morning a little while ago! My alarm in my iPhone sounded at 3:50 a.m. I had been in the middle of a dream in which I was still working for American Express and I was trying to make a plane reservation because I had to get to New York for a meeting. And I was trying to figure out if I had to stay overnight, even though I wasn't going to get there until very late, or whether I could just get a flight the next morning and only stay for the day. I tell you, the dream was so vivid I had to shake my head and lay there in bed for a few minutes to get my bearings and come back to reality – the reality of getting out of bed to finish getting ready for the morning's service!

Dreams can be powerful experiences. They can be visions into our past, present or future that keep us thinking for a long while about something that has happened in our past... something we're going through now... or perhaps something we are anticipating happening in the future. Some dreams may mean nothing at all, other than the fact that maybe I ate something too late that night that I shouldn't have! But some dreams stay with us... We just have to tell someone about them, because they seemed to be so... revealing.

The Book of Revelation is a *revealing* of a most extraordinary vision, most likely a vision of John of Patmos, a pastor of the late first century. Eugene Peterson, who authored *The Message, the Bible in Contemporary Language*, says of the Book of Revelation, “John of Patmos has worship on his mind. The vision, which is The Revelation, comes to him while he is at worship on a certain Sunday on the Mediterranean island of Patmos. He is responsible for a circuit of churches on the mainland whose primary task is worship. Worship shapes the human community in response to the living God.

[Peterson goes on,] if worship is neglected or perverted, our communities fall into chaos or under tyranny.... John’s Revelation is not easy reading. Besides being a pastor, John is a poet, fond of metaphor and symbol, image and allusion, passionate in his desire to bring us [his readers] into the presence of Jesus believing and adoring. But the demands he makes on our intelligence and imagination are well rewarded, for in keeping company with John, our worship of God will almost certainly deepen in urgency and joy.”^[1]

As a pastor, I’ll vouch for all of that with the Book of Revelation! I had an entire semester’s work on this wild book while I was in seminary. Before taking that course, I couldn’t, or wouldn’t, have given the Book of Revelation a second, or a first, reading. I thought it was nonsense, gibberish and no responsible way to end the Bible!

Our reading from Revelation 21 for this morning is one I very often read at memorial and graveside services – for its comforting words of what is to come, or at least what we *hope* is to come, after our deaths....

As Peterson interprets the words of the original text, “‘God has moved into the neighborhood, making his home with men and women! They’re his people, he’s their God. He’ll wipe every tear from their eyes. Death is gone for good – tears gone, crying gone, pain gone – all the first order of things gone.’ The Enthroned continued, ‘Look! I’m making everything new. Write it all down – each word dependable and accurate.’” (Rev 21:3-4, *The Message*)

“Death is gone for good – tears gone, crying gone, pain gone...” I don’t know about you, but I find those words very comforting... John of Patmos was truly a pastor, offering words of assurance and hope and vision to those early Christians who were being severely persecuted by the governmental officials of their day.

I know it’s hard for us to imagine that situation in *our* day in *our* country, where we do have the freedom to worship, or not, as we choose. But envision this

– it’s the end of our service today and as you exit from the back door there are guards with guns standing outside telling you that you must now call – fill in the blank – Governor Mills, President Biden, Donald Trump, Nancy Pelosi, Mitch McConnell... chose *your* favorite villain... that you must now call that person, “Lord and Savior.” Not Jesus the Christ, as your “Lord and Savior,” but one of them! How would you respond? (get responses)

I believe I would respond by saying, “NO, ‘X’ is not my “Lord and Savior! **Jesus** is!” But would I say that if someone was pointing a gun at me? I don’t know... So, in John’s day, he’s offering a word, many words in the Book of Revelation, of hope, of promise of new life, *after* death if not before, a vision of the world as it might be, as it could be, if only... if only... we could learn to love one another... as Jesus loves us.

Today our focus has been on “eschatology,” that’s a fancy seminary word for the theological study of the end of time.” And the Book of Revelation is the Christian interpretation of that study from the writing of a pastor of the late first century. John says, in twenty-two chapters, 404 verses total, that at the end of time, Jesus will be there to meet us at the door... or the gate... and will beckon us into the next part of our spiritual journeys.

Not to worry! Jesus is coming to escort you into the New Jerusalem, where there will be no more mourning, or crying, or pain... All will be well. Again, I don’t know about you, but I find that prospect very comforting. Can I prove that it’s a fact? Can I guarantee that the scenario pastor John of Patmos envisions will come true? Nope. I can’t prove or guarantee a thing.

But I can tell you this... from the deepest part of my spiritual self... that I’d rather live *with* that hope than *without* it. Wouldn’t you? I’d rather live with the possibility that some day I will be holding my mother’s hand again and looking into her beautiful gray/blue eyes, in some form. I know many of you, too, hope to be with your loved ones who have moved into the next part of our eternal journeys.

This is a good hope, my friends. Not a silly one. Not an immature one. Not one to be laughed about or scoffed at. Pastor John of Patmos didn’t think it was silly two thousand years ago, and neither do I.

I have to tell you that after twenty plus years of ministry, I am most saddened by those who can’t, or who refuse to, believe there is something more after we die. But I know I can’t force someone to believe what *I* believe, any more than armed soldiers standing at the back door of our church could convince me that I should call any of our government officials “Lord and Savior.”

This faith thing is tricky. It's not fixed. It's not a guarantee. It's not pie in the sky. It's not Christmas morning with lots of gifts under the tree. It's not the Easter Bunny. It's not Halloween, filled with too much candy and funny costumes. It's All Hallows Eve, with our thoughts on all the saints who have gone before us, who have taught us how to live and how to die.

It's all a vision. It's hope. It's love. It's trust in the one whom we follow who calls us home every day and every night, if only we open our ears to hear and open our eyes to see. It's a new heaven and a new earth. It's "the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end." (Revelation 21:6a)

Let the people say, "Amen."

Federated Church in Thomaston
United Church of Christ United Methodist Church
All Are Welcome
Sunday, October 31, 2021 – for All Saints Day

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

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 Great Praise to Thee -- Theodore DuBois

Call to Worship

Leader: God of unfailing light, in your realm of glory the poor are blessed, the hungry filled, and every tear is wiped away.

People: Strengthened by this vision, may we follow in the way of holiness that you have made known to us in life and in death.

All: Let us worship the God of all the saints this day!

***Opening Hymn** "I Sing a Song of the Saints of God" 712 Blue Hymnal

A Responsive Reading "A Prayer Meditation for All Saints Day (see insert)

A Moment of Silence

SERVICE OF THE WORD

Scripture Reading Revelation 21:1-6a

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

Message “a new heaven and a new earth” Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet

***Hymn of Meditation** “Shall We Gather at the River” 723 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 Saint Anthony's Chorale -- Attributed to Franz Joseph Haydn

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

***Prayer of Dedication**

***Closing Hymn** “For All the Saints” 711 Blue Hymnal

Benediction

Postlude Variations on "Lead On O King Eternal" -- Hymn Tune "Lancashire"

Revised Common Lectionary Readings for Sunday, November 7, 2021
Ruth 3:1-5, 4:13-17; Psalm 127; Hebrews 9:24-28; Mark 12:38-44

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 Whirty, 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!; Enid, Ann Foster, Carol Moss, Fred Bagnall, Julie Pollitt, Zeke Bryant, Helmut Steger, John Flaherty, Doug and 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 Harriet Williams who died this past week.**

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-11/1/21.....6:30 pm: Troop Meeting
 Sunday-11/7/21.....9:30 am: Holy Communion Service
2:00 pm: Hank Carey's Funeral Service-
 Reception to Follow

Suggested Food Pantry Donation.....Tuna Fish

The flowers this week are given by the Carey family

Deacon for November: Corinne Ervin

Reminders for next Sunday, 11/7/21

Greeter/Usher: Sandra and Lou

Caron

Coffee

Host:

Lector: Ron

Anderson

Flo

wers: Kay Sylvester

Collection Total for Sunday, October 24, 2021:

Collection correction for October 17, 2021:

Pledges -	\$696.00	Pledges -	\$573.00
Loose -	\$143.00	Loose -	\$ 88.00
Total -	\$839.00	Total -	\$661.00

The 2021 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 31, 2021

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

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^[1]Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message, The Bible in Contemporary Language*, Colorado Springs: NavPress Publishing Group, 2004, p. 1433.