

Good Sunday morning from a chilly hill in Rockport.....

Have you ever read or heard a quote or a poem and thought, “Gee, I want to write that down and remember it.” I do that often because I am so in awe when a person takes just a few words and extends their meaning and beauty far beyond what their brevity would suggest. That is the power in poetry I suppose. Recently I found one of those memorable poems in the front of the little black leather Bible I used to take with me to Windward Gardens for a worship service there once a month. I had taped this particular poem inside the front cover on gold parchment paper sometime in the past ten to fifteen years.

“Destiny,” written by Edwin Arnold, an English writer and poet who died in 1904, goes like this...

“Somewhere there waiteth in this world of ours  
For one lone soul, another lonely soul –  
Each chasing each through all the weary hours,  
And meeting strangely at one sudden goal;  
Then blend they – like green leaves with golden flowers,  
Into one beautiful and perfect whole –  
And life’s long night is ended, and the way  
Lies open onward to eternal day.”

I reread this poem for the first time in several years a while ago, the day after one of the presidential elections in this country. It might have been 2008. As time goes on, perhaps we’ll say the most important presidential election in more than a century occurred this coming Tuesday!

While I believe Arnold was writing about the union of two individual people whose “destiny” it is to finally meet, I couldn’t help but think of a larger context -- about our country and us this week. For fear of lessening the power of Arnold’s words as a metaphor for what each of us have been waiting for and finally meeting and then blending “into one beautiful and perfect whole,” I will not try to interpret his poem from my view point. But I invite you to think about what is happening to us and to our country this week in terms of Arnold’s words. Let me know your thoughts...

Blessed be our coming days,  
blessed be our blending with hopefulness,  
blessed be what opportunities and challenges lie open before us now,  
blessed be our destiny to continue as a truly democratic nation under God....

Blessings to each one this chilly Sunday morn..... Susan

p.s. I will download this morning's scripture reading and sermon to my Facebook page later today: freerangepastor for anyone who wants to tune in..... and I believe Margie is also downloading my sermon to Federated's Facebook page....

p.p.s. *Thank you to those of you who send me your e-mail responses to my writings. I don't always get a chance to write back to each one of you, but I appreciate all your responses! They keep me motivated to keep writing.....*

**A simple online worship service for Sunday, November 1, 2020  
All Saints Day  
as prepared by Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet  
Pastor of the Federated Church of Thomaston**

**A Call to Worship**

Eternal God, you know our yesterdays, our todays, and our tomorrows.  
Give us the faith this day to know all will be well  
no matter what is to come in the days ahead.  
We come in cyberspace worship this day  
seeking your guidance, living in hope  
and always remembering your saving love for us all.  
Amen.

**An Affirmation of Faith**



We believe in a God who is never confined to our imaging,  
is never in bondage to our beliefs,  
and never held fast in our dwelling places.

Our God is the mystery  
of divine and human bound together,  
of power and vulnerability,  
of crucifixion and resurrection.

Our God is the wonder  
of truth and compassion,  
of liberation and responsibility  
of eternal wisdom and costly grace.

We celebrate this God who leaps free of all our boundaries  
in love stretching out from horizon to horizon,

and in mercy bending deep into fragile human hearts.

✿ Written by Dorothy McRae-McMahon, Thornbury, Australia

### **A Reading of Scripture – Matthew 5:1-12**

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds  
of evil  
against you falsely on my account.

Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way  
they persecuted the prophets who were before  
you.”  
Matthew 5:1-12

### **A sermon based on Matthew 5:1-12**

#### **“Blessed are....”**

Will you pray with me. God of true blessings and saints, of final judgment and sinners, be with us in these coming moments. Help us to want to strive for your righteousness -- for being in right relation with you and all our neighbors. Remind us of the saints who have shown us the way to your righteousness. Teach us that we may teach others about your blessings upon this chaotic world. Amen.

What does it mean to be blessed? We say “bless you” when someone sneezes. We say “bless you” when someone has done something nice for us. We say we feel blessed with “good fortune” or “good health.” But what does it *really* mean to be blessed or to *receive* a blessing?

In the middle and late first century, blessings were hard to come by for Christians living in a Roman world. They were forced to put their newfound faith in Jesus to the ultimate endurance test. They were not free to worship God as they had come to find God in Jesus as their Christ. They were supposed to worship the Roman emperor. Within their own Christian community, immorality and greed weakened their hearts and tested their commitment to God. Just read the Apostle Paul's Letters and you learn more of that!

Living in a Roman world where worship of the emperor was expected and demanded, early Christians had little control over their lives. They most likely felt far from God and hungry for blessings seemingly out of their reach and impossible to obtain.

Into this world, the Gospel writers stepped. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John wrote to explain and proclaim the universal significance of the life and death and resurrection of someone who made a difference for all time. Each Gospel writer had his own point of view and a particular audience in mind when he put his story together.

The authors of the Gospels were not neutral in their interpretations of what they had seen and heard of Jesus' life and death and resurrection. They wrote down their stories in order to make a difference in the lives of those early Christians who read, and more often listened to, their words. Jesus made a difference! The proclamation of his life and death and resurrection continues to make a difference to all who read and hear and attempt to understand what his presence in the world meant then and continues to mean now.

Our Scripture passage today relates the beginning of what has become known as Jesus' "Sermon on the Mount" as it is described in the Gospel of Matthew. The entire sermon may not have been delivered by Jesus on one occasion – it may be a compilation of teachings presented on numerous occasions.

There is a parallel telling of this sermon in the Gospel of Luke. The beginning of the sermon in both Gospels consist of what has come to be known as "the Beatitudes." Beatitudes are blessings. While the Luke passage is not part the assigned readings for today, I believe a comparison of the Beatitudes as they are described in both Matthew and Luke offers much food for reflection, especially in this particular moment of our lives in this country.

In Matthew's version of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus preaches from "up on a mountain" where "his disciples came to him." (Matthew 5:1) In Luke's

version, known as the Sermon on the Plain, Jesus “came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people...” (Luke 6:17)

Matthew’s version is longer with more teachings. Its Beatitudes, its blessings, are written mostly in the third person. Matthew’s version begins, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5:3) Luke’s Beatitudes begin, “Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.” (Luke 6:20)

Three points stand out to me as I reflect on all of this. **FIRST**, Matthew positions Jesus *up* on a mountain *with only his immediate disciples nearby*. Luke speaks of Jesus delivering the blessings *while he stands among the people*. **SECOND**, Matthew speaks of Jesus referring to the poor “*in spirit*.” Luke speaks of Jesus referring to the *literal* poor. **THIRD**, Matthew speaks of Jesus talking *of others* – the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and search for righteousness. (Matthew 5:3-6) Luke speaks of Jesus talking *directly to the people* – you poor, you who are hungry, you who weep now. (Luke 6:20-21)

Do these differences make a difference? The difference, to me, is in the *type of relationship* implied in each account. **Jesus preached of relationships** throughout his short time in ministry. Jesus taught of justice and fairness *for all*. Matthew tells us that Jesus described in the Sermon on the Mount the *ideal character of a disciple*. Luke tells us that Jesus stated in the Sermon on the Plain that he *supported people in their suffering, all kinds of suffering*, and encouraged them to “hang on,” for they would receive the kingdom of Heaven. They would be filled and they would laugh.

**BOTH MESSAGES ARE IMPORTANT!** We need to hear them both, especially right now. We need to hear the *proclamation* of what it means to lead a disciplined, faithful life. **AND** we need to hear the intimacy of the personal message of Jesus to those who are suffering. A responsibility of discipleship *and* a gift of grace are implied.

We search for discipline in our lives. We suffer. But we also have much, sometimes too much as Americans, to be thankful for. We often hide from the responsibility and the relationship we all bear toward one another as children of God – each and every one of us, no matter our religion, our politics or our life styles. The responsibility and gift of blessedness comes in many different forms.

I remember I was driving up one of the main streets in Bangor sometime ago. It was VERY cold and I was on one of the streets that is pretty steep. I was sitting at the stoplight, thinking about all I needed to do that day, going over my list in my head, lost in my thoughts. And I noticed all of a sudden a woman who was attempting to walk up the hill on the sidewalk. She looked to be about my age. There wasn't any ice or snow on the sidewalk, but this woman was quite disfigured and almost half bent over as she tried to move her arms and legs in the same direction. She did have a coat on, but the temperature couldn't have been over 10 degrees. She moved slowly, very slowly – one difficult step at a time. And I found myself with tears in my eyes as I sat in my warm car thinking about my long list of tasks I hoped to accomplish that day. THIS woman's task was to get up that hill under her own steam.

The responsibility and gift of blessedness does, indeed, come in many different forms. What it means to be “*rich*” in life and in faith comes in many different forms. It has been said that for two-thirds of the world to be rich is “to have a choice of what you will eat tonight, to have a means of transportation other than your two feet and to have a change of underwear.” (take from *Homily Service*, v. 31., no. 10, January, 199?)

Most of us in the other third of the world, known as the “first world,” probably have enough food in our kitchen pantries to last us for a month. Many of us have two cars, and some a third car or a boat for fun in the Summer. And most of us have a drawer full of underwear to choose from each day.

Matthew teaches us that Jesus was concerned about those blessed who are poor and hungry *in spirit*. Luke teaches us that Jesus was also concerned about those blessed who are poor and hungry *in body*. I am blessed in being *reminded of my blessings* by a woman who struggles slowly to walk up a hill on a frigid morning. SHE is blessed, I hope, in *believing that she also is a child of God's kingdom*.

The words preserved on the oldest scrap of scripture we have are the familiar words of the blessing of Aaron in the Book of Numbers in the Hebrew Scriptures, the Old Testament to us Christians. *Ye va re ka adoni vi yish mer a kah*. “May the Lord bless you and keep you...” (Number 6:24) This blessing of Aaron was found not long ago on a piece of silver in a tomb, just south of Jerusalem, that dates from about 600 BCE. That's approximately 2,600 years ago. Blessedness has a long and varied biblical history.

Jesus preached of blessedness, and taught of the responsibility of discipleship and prayer for all to be rewarded in heaven.

To be blessed is to feel comforted by the faith that God is with us in our daily lives.

To be blessed is to know in our hearts that we have a place in God's dominion now and forever.

To be blessed is to acknowledge that the relationship we have with God and with one another is **the most fragile and consequential aspect of our lives.**

Through and beyond their words, the Beatitudes of Jesus' most well-known sermons remind us of the ancient biblical power of blessing and being blessed. *Ye va re ka adoni vi yish mer a kah.* "May the Lord bless you and keep you..." always. Let the people say, "Amen."

### **To hold in our prayers this day.....**

**P**rayers for each of us as we prepare to experience the most challenging and difficult national election of our time on Tuesday... May calm, common sense and compassion be within us all....

**A**nd hold in your prayers all those affected by the coronavirus and the families of those who have died from the virus....

**A**nd all those families affected by the use of addictive drugs and alcohol among their members....

**A**nd 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.....

From our most recent bulletin and more....

Ed Lee, Ann Foster, Carol Moss, Fred Bagnall, Harriet Williams, Julie Pollitt, Zeke Bryant, Sally Harjula, Elliot, Trish Perry, April DeVarney, Helmut Steger, John Flaherty, George Ng, Doug and BJ Thomson, Heather Van Buskirk, Muriel's grandson Jared, and Michael and Gail in southern Maine, .... ***Please send me the names of those you would like for me to add to this list next Sunday AND those you would like for me to remove from this list!***

### **A Benediction**

*Life is short, no matter the length of our days.*

*We do not have much time to gladden the hearts of those who make the way with us.*

*So, be swift to love. Make haste to be kind.*

*And may the Creator of us all, the Sustainer of us all,  
and the Holy Spirit surrounding us all,*

*be with each of you this day and forever.  
Amen.*

**Readings from the RCL (Revised Common Lectionary)  
for Sunday, November 8, 2020**

Joshua 24:1-3a, 14-25; Psalm 78:1-7; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Matthew 25:1-13

**Words to ponder today about “blessings” .....**

*“Reflect upon your present blessings – of which every [person] has many – not on your past misfortunes, of which all have some.” ~ Charles Dickens*

*“When we lose one blessing, another is often most unexpectedly given in its place.” ~ C. S. Lewis*

*“Those who expect to reap the blessings of freedom, must, like [all], undergo the fatigues of supporting it.” ~ Thomas Paine*

*“The unthankful heart discovers no mercies; but the thankful heart will find, in every hour, some heavenly blessings.” ~ Henry Ward Beecher*

*“The hardest arithmetic to master is that which enables us to count our blessings.” ~ Eric Hoffer*

And finally from John O’Donohue in *To Bless the Space Between Us: A Book of Blessings*:

*“For Equilibrium, a Blessing:  
Like the joy of the sea coming home to shore,  
May the relief of laughter rinse through your soul.*

*As the wind loves to call things to dance,  
May your gravity be lightened by grace.*

*Like the dignity of moonlight restoring the earth,  
May your thoughts incline with reverence and respect.*

*As water takes whatever shape it is in,  
So free may you be about who you become.*

*As silence smiles on the other side of what’s said,  
May your sense of irony bring perspective.*

*As time remains free of all that it frames,  
May your mind stay clear of all its names.*

*May your prayer of listening deepen enough  
To hear in the depths the laughter of god.”*

*May the Spirit of God and the Compassion of Jesus be with us all on Tuesday,  
November 3, 2020*