

Good frosty morning from a hill in Rockport..... It's 4:24 a.m., Eastern Standard Time, as I begin these words. Today is going to be a big day! First we will worship this morning, which will include sharing in Holy Communion by intinction – that's coming forward, one at a time, to receive the Bread and the Cup, as I look into the eyes of each one and say, "The bread of life for you, the cup of salvation for you." Then at 2 p.m. this afternoon we will hold a celebration of life for Henry (Hank) Carey in our sanctuary. Hall's Funeral Home is going to broadcast the service "live" downstairs in Leach Hall as we are holding the service in our sanctuary. We expect there will be a large, possibly overflowing, crowd gathered to honor Hank this afternoon. In his life, and through his death, Hank has seemed larger than life to many, many people – students, teachers, leaders in our community and beyond in too many capacities to name, and to each of us. Hank knew how to look into the eyes of each one he taught, supervised, stood beside, and learned from in his eighty-eight years.... He looked into each of those pairs of eyes and offered himself to them as a teacher and a friend.

In my sermon this morning I'll describe ten learnings about God that I've received in my twenty-two years of ministry. Today marks the twenty-second anniversary of my ordination into ministry in the United Church of Christ. Hank Carey epitomized those ten learnings as a man of deep faith, a follower of Jesus, a fellow traveler with each of us in this crazy world we try to understand to the best of our ability each day.

Hank's wife, Lucy, and his family request that if you are coming to his celebration, please wear a mask. We are not out of the woods in this covid nightmare we have all had to experience and endure since March, 2020. We will be singing this afternoon, which we have learned is one of the major ways to spread this virus, and we will be closer together in body than we usually are. We will have no idea who has been vaccinated, and who has not. We will keep doors open for air to circulate. Please honor Hank's family's request.

This coming Friday, November 12, we will remember Harriet Williams who passed away two weeks ago in Brunswick. Harriet was a long-standing, active member of the Federated family. Her service will be at Burpee Carpenter and Hutchins Funeral Home at 110 Limerock Street in Rockland at 1 p.m. Her granddaughter, Emmie, will meet those who would like to stop by the funeral home between noon and 1 p.m. right before Harriet's service at 1 p.m.

So, to end these "Sunday Words," two questions – Who do you see when you look a person in the eye? Who does that person see when they look into your eyes?

Blessings to each one this first Sunday in November..... Susan

p.s. Next Sunday, November 14th, Rev. Dick Hanks will be leading worship and preaching as I take my "one Sunday a month" and step away from the pulpit. This is NOT a week of vacation, only a Sunday morning for me to catch my breath and be quiet in the presence of the Spirit that hovers over us all....

"God is..."

A Sermon for the Federated Church of Thomaston

Thomaston, Maine

Sunday, November 7, 2021

Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet

Scripture: Mark 12:38-44

As [Jesus] taught, he said, “Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets! They devour widows’ houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.”

He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. Then he called his disciples and said to them, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For all of them have contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.” Mark 12:38-44

Will you pray with me. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts this day be acceptable to you, O God, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Once again, this is not the sermon I intended to deliver today, but for three reasons – this afternoon we will be celebrating the life of Hank Carey, teacher extraordinaire. Next Friday we will be celebrating the life of Harriet Williams, long standing and devoted member of the Federated family. And third, today is the 22nd anniversary of my ordination! In preparation for this morning, I looked up the sermon I delivered on November 8th, 2009 in which I offered ten learnings I had about God over the ten years since my ordination in 1999. This morning, I want to update those ten learnings for 2021.

Don’t worry, we won’t be here beyond our usual time this morning! And these ten points are not “Pastor Susan’s ten commandments,” but they are a reflection of what I’ve learned and come to appreciate over these twenty-two years of ministry.

Point number one: God is love. I know that because the Bible tells me so – in many verses of the Old and New Testaments, in many stories of God’s actions in people’s lives as they are described in amazing detail – from Noah to Abraham, from Moses to David, from Hannah to Ruth, from Jesus to Paul, from Jesus’ mother Mary to Mary Magdalene, from a wealthy Roman centurion to a poor widow. From beginning to end, the Bible tells the story of God’s love for the world in the midst of terrible circumstances, many human misdeeds, and unbelievable divine miracles.

But it’s not only from the Bible that I know that God is love. It’s from all of you that I know it, too. We’ve shared many things even in the three years I’ve

been with you – family changes, births and deaths, upheavals in the world and in our country, tears and laughter. And in the midst of it all, God’s love pours over me through your passionate commitment to this church and our community.

Point number two: God is abundance. God is the overflowing gift of unexpected riches in the midst of poverty – poverty of material possessions and poverty of mind. The widow in our story for today is materially poverty stricken as were most widows of her day, but she is rich in her desire to please God. She is rich in courage. She has abundant faith in the midst of wealthy worshipers and pompous religious officials who surely looked down upon her and did not see what Jesus saw in her.

Point number three: God is understanding. God is the force that is present when no one seems to appreciate or affirm the confusion, despair and longing that each of us feels at some point or many times in our lives. When all else fails, when no one turns to us and there’s nowhere to turn for understanding, we turn to God, for God is understanding.

Point number four: God is grace. God is the undeserved, underestimated, unremitting, undeniable gift of grace that comes to us each moment of our lives. Our role is to simply accept it, say thank you and pass it on. The poor widow in our story for today gets it. She knows that even if she hardly has two cents to rub together, God accepts her as she is, receives her gift unconditionally and offers her the grace of knowing she is accepted in her poverty as if she were wealthy beyond imagination.

Point number five: God is healing. God takes us by the hand and walks with us through the death of a son, the death of a partner, the death of a friend, the medical diagnosis that makes us fear for our lives, the addiction that robs us of ourselves, the relationship break up that shatters our worlds. God grabs us and says, “Hold on. All will be well. Don’t worry. I will be with you until the end of time.” I’ve learned that healing is a process not a product. Healing from all wounds is available.

Point number six: God is trust. The book of Hebrews in the New Testament tells us, “Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” (Heb 11:1) God is trustworthy and true. If the poor widow in our passage for today didn’t trust God, how could she have had the courage to come forward in the temple to give her widow’s mite in the midst of the rich and powerful men of her time? “In God we trust” our coins say, do we?

Point number seven: God is energy. God is the force that gives us theumph to get out of bed each morning. We might think it's a good night's sleep that gets us up, but it's more than that. It's the drive to keep going, even when the odds are not in our favor. When we say, "I don't know how much more I can take," God takes over while we go on auto pilot for a while. It's a trite bumper sticker saying, but "God is my co-pilot" is true, if we allow it to be so.

Point number eight: God is renewal. The prophet Isaiah proclaims God's promise, "I will make all things new." Not all new things, but all things new. Renewal of mind, renewal of body, renewal of spirit – when the last hint of hope seems to be gone, God renews. God says through Isaiah's words, "Get up! I will give you wings like eagles." I will wipe away your tears. I will bring you new life in the midst of seeming death. I will renew your life and your faith.

Point number nine: God is inspiration. God inspires in many forms – in a poor widow giving her last two coins in the temple, in the prophetic words of Isaiah and Jeremiah and Micah, in the heat of a burning bush and in the beginning of time, in the life and teaching of Jesus, and in the people who have done all they could to walk in Jesus' footsteps, giving of themselves so that others might live more abundantly -- Mother Teresa, Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., and dare I say, Hank Carey and Harriet Williams, and so many others.

Point number ten: God is saving. God is saving you and me from ourselves and one another. God is saving us from our differences and our disagreements, from our prejudices and our problems. God is saving us that we might finally get it – that God is love and not hate. God is for us all and against none of us. God is saving us that we might finally accept the amazing grace of gathering with the saints at the river of life that flows by the throne of God.

I've learned and re-learned these ten things in the past twenty-two years. I can't wait to see what I learn in the next.... however many years I stand in this pulpit and walk with you in our faith journeys.

Thank you, each of you, for taking this journey with me. You are the latest, in a long line of fellow travelers who have reminded me that I am not alone in this adventure, and neither are you. God is love. We are the loved.

Let the people say, "Amen."

Federated Church in Thomaston
United Church of Christ United Methodist Church
All Are Welcome

Sunday, November 7, 2021

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

*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 Morning Prayer -- Tchaikowski

Call to Worship

Leader: O God, we come with everything that we are and have.

People: Teach us to share not only out of the abundance of our lives but also out of our poverty. Strip our pretenses; still our need for attention; quiet our long prayers.

All: Help us to give away our lives so we can find ourselves in you. Let us worship God.

*Opening Hymn "America" 697 Blue Hymnal

A Responsive Reading "For Our Country" (429 in blue hymnal)

O God, keep our whole country under your protection.

Wipe out sin from this land;

lift it up from the depth of sorrow, O Lord, our shining light.

Save us from deep grief and misfortune, Lord of all nations.

**Bless us with your wisdom, so that the poor may not be oppressed
and the rich may not be oppressors.**

**Make this a nation having no ruler except God,
a nation having no authority but that of Love.**

Amen.

A Moment of Silence.... then "Taps" for *Veterans Day on Thursday, November 11
and all who have given their lives in times of war*

SERVICE OF THE WORD

Scripture Reading Mark 12:38-44

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

Message "God is...." Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet

***Hymn of Meditation** “Come, Ye Thankful People Come” 694 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 Sweet, Sweet Spirit -- Doris Akers/Arr by Robert J. Hughes

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

***Prayer of Dedication**

Service of Holy Communion (see insert) *We will come forward to receive the Bread & the Cup*

***Closing Hymn** “For the Healing of the Nations” 428 Blue Hymnal

Benediction

Postlude March -- Henri D'Aubel

Revised Common Lectionary Readings for Sunday, November 14, 2021

Guest Preacher – Rev. Dick Hanks

1 Samuel 1:4-20; 1 Samuel 2:1-10; Hebrews 10:11-14, (15-18), 19-25; Mark 13:1-8

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!; Enid, Ann Foster, Carol Moss, Fred Bagnall, **Harriet Williams’ family**, Julie Pollitt, Zeke Bryant, Helmut Steger, John Flaherty, BJ Thomson & **family of Mimi’s Uncle Doug**, 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.....

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-11/8/21.....6:30 pm: Troop Meeting

Sunday-11/14/21.....9:30 am: Worship Service
Suggested Food Pantry Donation.....Baked Beans

The flowers this week are given by Kay Sylvester in honor of all Veterans and all the people with November birthdays.

Reminders for next Sunday, 11/14/21

Greeter/Usher: Sandra and Lou Caron Coffee
Host: Lector: Sandra
Caron
Flowers: Neil and Pearl
Stetson

Collection Total for Sunday, October 31, 2021:

Pledges -	\$1256.00
Loose -	\$ 47.00
Total -	\$1303.00

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, November 7, 2021

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