

Good Sunday morning from a chilly, yet sunny hill in Rockport.....

“The human mind is capable of holding in fragile equipoise many and logically conflicting ideas.” These words of New Testament professor, Luke Timothy Johnson, appear in all three editions of his book, *The Writings of the New Testament, An Interpretation*. I first read those words, in Professor Johnson’s first edition of his book, in one of my early New Testament classes in seminary in the late 1990’s. Even then, when I knew SO little about the Bible and theological study, that sentiment hit me between the eyes and helped me begin to understand more clearly biblical truth, and yes, moving forward, even the truth of this day, November 8, 2020. This week in my meditations I will focus on that statement by considering several of the themes I believe are within it – the *capability* of the human mind, the *fragility* of our thinking, the *balance* within our souls, and the *logical conflicts* we face in the coming months and years.

Stay tuned.... For today, take a deep breath..... maybe many deep breaths.... Get some rest.... Try turning off your TV, your smart phone, and your laptop computer. Give thanks for the days behind us, this day, and all the days to come.....

Blessings to each one this chilly, sunny 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. *AGAIN, thanks so much 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 continue writing.....*

**A simple online worship service for Sunday, November 8, 2020
as prepared by Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet
Pastor of the Federated Church of Thomaston**

A Call to Worship

We come together in this cyberspace community of believers
to take courage, to stand firm, to keep the faith
and focus on what really matters in these changing times.

We come together to find encouragement and assurance
that all will be well in our country in these coming months.

We come to worship, to wonder and to welcome all

to be our brothers and sisters, no matter who they are.
Amen.

**A Prayer for Guidance by Dwight Eisenhower in his Inaugural Address,
January 20, 1953**

*Almighty God, as we stand here at this moment
my future associates in the Executive branch of Government
join me in beseeching that Thou will make full and complete dedication
to the service of the people in this throng, and their fellow citizens
everywhere. Give us, we pray, the power to discern clearly right from wrong,
and allow all our words and actions to be governed thereby,
and by the laws of this land.*

*Especially we pray that our concern shall b
for all the people regardless of station, race or calling.
May cooperation be permitted and be the mutual aim of those who,
under the concepts of our Constitution, hold to differing political faiths;
so that all may work for the good of our beloved country and Thy glory.*

Amen.

(source: www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=9600)

A Reading of Scripture – Matthew 25:1-13

“Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; but the wise took flasks of oil for their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. But at midnight there was a shout, ‘Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’ Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ But the wise replied, ‘No! There will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.’ And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut. Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open to us.’ But he replied, ‘Truly I tell you, I do not know you.’ Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.”

A sermon based on Matthew 25:1-13
“... those who were ready ...”

Pray with me. Patient God, help us to prepare. But more importantly help us to know what it is we need to prepare for. Be with us in the coming moments, as we think about getting ready. Amen.

I want to talk with you today about something that is near and dear to all of us, something that is on our minds from morning til night, either consciously or through our actions. It is something we can't live without – TIME. (bring out clock!)

I used to have an atomic clock. I seem to have lost it somewhere along the way, but I remember it said on the box it came in that it was absolutely accurate. Every night, sometime in the middle of the night, it would correct itself by an atomic clock in Colorado that somehow beamed waves right into my bedroom to make sure that when I woke up in the morning and looked at the clock, I would know EXACTLY what time it was!

This clock has a battery. When the battery runs down, I have to replace it with a new battery. Hold onto that thought.

After reading our scripture passage for this morning from the Gospel of Matthew, I found myself thinking about time almost ALL the time. I began writing down all the ways we think about time:

Time stands still. Time marches on. Take one day at a time. He has too much time on his hands. Time's up. It's not the right time. It's the wrong time. Time is of the essence. Time flies. There's never enough time. Let the good times roll. What time is it? Do you have the time? Do you know how to tell time? I guess it was his time. I don't have enough time.

Time – it is the thing we all labor over, stew about, dread, wait for, exhaust, waste, savor and never seem to have enough of. But in exact time – we all have the same amount. No matter how rich or poor, how young or old, or smart or not, or beautiful or not, we all have the same number of hours in the days and the nights. Time is the great equalizer. Time plays no favorites.

In the Bible, specifically in the New Testament, time is talked about in several ways. We've reflected on this before, and now, in this particular time in our country, I think it's an important time to talk about it again. There is *kai-ROS* time. And there is *KRO-nos* time.

Kai-ROS time designates an occasion or a season or an opportunity.^[1] In Matthew 24:21 Jesus, speaking of the end of time says, “For at that time [*kai-ROS* time] there will be great suffering, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be.” He is speaking of an occasion, or an unending season.

KRO-nos time designates a space of time.^[2] In Matthew 25:19 Jesus, speaking in a parable says, “After a long time [*KRO-nos* time] the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them.” He is speaking of a period of time.

Whether an occasion or a period – time marches on. Occasions come and go and are foretold in scripture. Periods of time are endured and waited for in scripture. Both occasions and periods of time are hope for in scripture.

The kingdom of heaven is what Jesus wants us to hope for – it is both an occasion and a period and so much more than either of those. Jesus begins many of his parables with the words, “Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this.” (Matthew 25:1) as in our text for this morning. Or, “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to . . .” (Matthew 22:2). Or, “The kingdom of heaven is like . . .” (Matthew 20:1)

God’s time is not OF the essence. God’s time IS the essence. How we spend time, or waste it, or utilize it is up to each of us in our own time. And all the while *I* wonder whether God looks on and wonders when and how we will finally get with the program and recognize the *kai-ROS* times of our lives.

Right now, in our country, could be a *kai-ROS* time, a season of opportunity, to move forward, to grow, to learn from one another in all our diversity and with all our differences. It will remain to be seen for some time whether we can grasp this crucial season of opportunity to accomplish something good for all of us.

In our parable from the Gospel of Matthew for today, five people have used their time wisely. They’ve stocked up for the future. They’ve bought provisions to get them through the night. Five other people have not used their time wisely. They have not stocked up for the future. And they do not have provisions to get them through the night. Time runs out for them. The door to the kingdom of heaven shuts in their faces. For the five who are ready, who spent their time wisely, let the good times roll! They are on the right side of the door to the kingdom of heaven.

This is a pretty harsh and stark parable. It sounds like it doesn’t leave much wiggle room for the five unprepared bridesmaids. Does it mean that it doesn’t leave us much wiggle room either? Surely, we’ll be let in, won’t we, whether

we've prepared or not to enter the kingdom of heaven? Surely there will be room for those of us who just didn't have time to finish our homework or accomplish all the help. Surely, there will be room for us, won't there?

Maybe this parable of the ten bridesmaids is given to us this week as a wake up call – in the midst of the turmoil we've been going through with the pandemic, politics and panic all around us.

Time, both as an occasion or season, *kai-ROS* time, and as a period of time, *KRO-nos* time, stand before us. Here's a few questions for today: How do you use your time? And what is it you are preparing for? How do you demonstrate with your actions and your words what you hold to be the most precious use of your time? These are weighty questions. I've been thinking about them all week.

But as I've thought about these questions, I've also worked to not be too hard on myself. Using time wisely doesn't necessarily mean being busy and industrious in all of our waking hours. There's another kind of time usage and preparing, another way of spending our time that is just as important as checking off the number of things we have accomplished on our daily "to do" lists. And this has to do with God's "to do" list.

Long before the radical change in my life in 1995, a good friend of mine said something to me one day in the midst of a conversation we were having about having too much to do. What she said affected me then, and continues to affect me. She said, "What a waste of the spirit we have endured for the sake of industry." I was so struck by those words that I wrote them down. "What a waste of the spirit we have endured for the sake of industry."

In Jesus' parable of the ten bridesmaids, I wonder what we could guess the five unprepared bridesmaids were doing with their time. Maybe they were filling their time up with too many "to do" list things. Maybe they were too busy "doing" for themselves and doing nothing for others. Maybe they were not busy enough just "being." Maybe they were too busy to pray.

The five prepared bridesmaids knew of spiritual things. They knew how to be ready for the coming of the Lord. They knew that time could be filled in good and productive ways and also be full of the spirit of God.

The close to exact time is..... (look at the clock). Remember I said to hold onto that thought. Sometimes we need to replace *our* batteries as well as the batteries in our clocks. Sometimes we need a wake up call. Let this particular time in our country be that wake up call to begin again in a new time. The five

prepared bridesmaids knew exactly what they needed to know to be ready to enter the kingdom of heaven in God's time. They were ready. Are you?

Let the people say, "Amen."

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

And 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 and alcohol among their members....

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.....

From our most recent bulletin and more....

From a Thomaston resident, please pray for Sean for healing, and for James fighting Covid-19,

Also continued prayers for 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 15, 2020

Judges 4:1-7; Psalm 123; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11; Matthew 25:14-30

Words to ponder today about "time".....

“You may delay, but time will not.” ~ Benjamin Franklin

“Time is too slow for those who wait, too swift for those who fear, too long for those who grieve, too short for those who rejoice, but for those who love, time is eternity.” ~ Henry Van Dyke

“Sometimes when I meet old friends, it reminds me how quickly time passes.... So, let us reflect what is truly of value in life, what gives meaning to our lives, and set our priorities on the basis of that. The purpose of our life needs to be positive. We weren't born with the purpose of causing trouble, harming others. For our life to be of value, I think we must develop basic good human qualities – warmth, kindness, compassion. Then our life becomes meaningful and more peace – happier.” ~ the Dalai Lama XIV

[1]In *The Greek Dictionary of the New Testament* in *The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, New York: Thomas Nelson Publishers, p. 39.

[2]Ibid., p. 78.