

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

“I can see clearly now the rain is gone.....” so the song begins. Well, *I* can’t see *clearly*, but I can see better than I have since this past Wednesday! The next lines of the song go like this: *“I can see all obstacles in my way. Gone are the dark clouds that had me blind, it’s gonna be a bright, bright sunshiny day. It’s gonna be a bright, bright sunshiny day.”* Can we hold onto that thought, and sing that tune in the coming weeks and months? As our organist, Alice, has taught us – in music, in hymns, in songs of all kinds, we can find both comfort and hope in the midst of challenging days and fearful nights.... Let’s keep singing in our minds, humming with our voices, and remembering that holding onto perspective is a steady and sturdy flagpole for us to grasp in these challenging times. That’s it for today.... I’ll try to get back to my daily meditations tomorrow. Thanks so much to each of you who have been in touch with me over these past few days of my very unclear vision....

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 15, 2020
as prepared by Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet
Pastor of the Federated Church of Thomaston**

A Call to Worship

Amazing God, when we are perplexed and challenged by scripture,
we come with willing hearts and open minds
to learn of your abundant possibilities.
Help us listen for your voice and gain courage
to be bold in our response,
even as we worship far from one another in cyberspace,
but near as each breath in our hearts and minds this day.
Let us worship God.

“Four Essential Freedoms” *



In the future days, which we seek to make secure, we look forward to a world founded upon four essential human freedoms.

The first is freedom of speech and expression – everywhere in the world.

The second is freedom of people to worship God in their own way – everywhere in the world.

The third is freedom from want – which, translated into world terms, means economic understandings which will secure to every nation a healthy peacetime life for its inhabitants – everywhere in the world.

The fourth is freedom from fear – which, translated into world terms, means a world-wide reduction of armaments to such a point and in such a thorough fashion that no nation will be in a position to commit an act of physical aggression against any neighbor – anywhere in the world.

That is no vision of a distant millennium. It is a definite basis for a kind of world attainable in our own time and generation. That kind of world is the very antithesis of the so-called new order of tyranny which the dictators seek to create with the crash of a bomb.

To that new order we oppose the greater conception – the moral order. A good society is able to face schemes of world domination and foreign revolutions alike without fear....

This nation has placed its destiny in the hands and heads and hearts of its millions of free men and women; and its faith in freedom under the guidance of God. Freedom means the supremacy of human rights everywhere. Our support goes to those who struggle to gain those rights or keep them. Our strength is our unity of purpose. To that high concept there can be no end save victory.



* These words are from President Franklin Delano Roosevelt when he spoke to Congress in January of 1941, as the battles of World War II were not going well for the Allies. It became known as the “Four Essential Freedoms” speech. This speech appears in *Prayers for the Common Good*, edited by A. Jean Leshner.

A Reading of Scripture – Matthew 25:14-30

For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. The one who had received the five

talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and **trustworthy** slave; you have been **trustworthy** in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.' And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and **trustworthy** slave; you have been **trustworthy** in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master. Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying 'Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.' But his master replied, 'You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'"

Matthew 25:14-30

A sermon based on Matthew 25:14-30
"... trustworthy ..."

Will you pray with me. Challenging God, you invite us into your kingdom with hard stories – parables that read like “spiritual hand grenades.” They explode before us and you make us think, when we would rather just receive your healing touch without delay, without any action on our parts. Open us to your wisdom. Invite us into your hard lessons that we might become more aware of your presence among us this day. Amen.

Here's the question for the day: Are you a risk taker? Let that question sink in for a moment... Are you are risk taker?

To take a risk can mean to expose ourselves to danger... or to possibility.

To take a risk can mean to take a chance and run the risk of losing everything... or for the sake of something better, no matter the risk involved.

To take a risk can mean we trust when perhaps we shouldn't have... if we were thinking clearly and responsibly... or to trust and hope for the best, no matter the outcome of taking that risk.

Here is a fact of life – it's full of risky business!

From the time we get up in the morning to the time we go to bed at night all kinds of things can happen -- I can trip on the throw rug next to my bed and go flying across the room.

I can slip in the shower and end up bruised or worse before I even stagger to the kitchen to make my coffee.

I can get in my car after dark in the evening, start down the road and have someone cross the center line who's had too much to drink or has fallen asleep at the wheel, and it's the end for me and them.

I can choke on a nut in a tasty muffin and not be able to breath and fall out of my kitchen chair and knock my teeth out or break my nose.

Yes indeed, life is a risky business.

But those are the risks that are hard for me to avoid. How about the ones over which we have more control? Where, or whether, to go to college after high school? Who to marry, nor not? Which job to take, if any are offered at all? Which town or city in which to live, and for how long? How many children to have, or not? Perhaps when to divorce, or not? When to retire, or not? Which church to attend, or not? Whether to have faith in something beyond me, or not?

We have some control over all of those decisions throughout our lifetimes... and the choices we make in them affect the rest of our lives, or at least a good portion of them.

Yes indeed, life is a risky business.

O.K., this is where our passage for today from the Gospel of Matthew comes in. Do you know how much a "talent" was worth in monetary terms in Jesus' day? Depending on which commentary you read, a talent can be equivalent to "3,000 shekels – about 75 pounds of gold or silver. In ancient Greece, a talent was the amount of silver needed to pay a crew of 200 rowers for a month."^[1]

Another commentary suggests that a talent "is a large sum of money, equal to the wages of a day laborer for fifteen years."^[2] So five talents would have been worth forty-five years of wages for one person. That's a lot of money! It's a lot of money to entrust to anyone – five talents, two talents, or even one talent.

So in the parable for today, the first slave turns five talents into ten, and the second slave turns two talents into four. The third slave turns his one talent into, as my mother would have said, “what the little boy shot at,” nothing... more than the one talent he was entrusted with by his boss.

There are several possible interpretations of this parable.

Sometimes it’s used to teach congregations about financial stewardship – how important it is to give to the church from your pocket book many times over. You want to be a “good member,” don’t you... in the eyes of the Lord?

Sometimes it’s used to get across the idea that God gives us many resources to use to the best of our ability so we may be affirmed that we are good and loyal and hardworking people of faith. And we wouldn’t want to waste what the Lord has given us, would we?

But there’s a third way to look at this parable... and that is to say it’s about taking risks.

It’s about stepping out into the unknown and believing a safety net will be there.

It’s about taking the little we have, in monetary or more even importantly non-monetary forms, and turning it into an abundance of riches, all the while knowing things might not turn out as we had hoped before we started.

It’s about saying “Yes” right now, when we’d rather say, “Well... maybe later.”

It’s about going forward with hope and trust that all will be well... rather than looking backward, complaining and bemoaning the fact that we didn’t do as well as we could have, or that it wasn’t our fault, it was someone else’s fault that the situation didn’t turn out right.

There are many excuses we can make for not taking risks, and some of them are good ones – “I’ve got to think of my family first,” or “If I lose my job over this, I won’t be able to pay my bills,” or “My health simply won’t allow me to take this on.” Other excuses are just that – excuses for why we can’t do a certain thing, make a needed change of course, reconsider old ways in light of new information.

I think of one of my favorite Peanuts comic strips – in the first box, Charlie Brown says to Lucy, “I can’t go to school today.” In the second box, Lucy says very seriously, “Well, if you can’t go because you don’t feel well, you can’t go.” In the third box, Charlie Brown looks very sad and so does Lucy. In the fourth box, Charlie Brown says from underneath his covers, “I have a knot in my shoelaces.” Lucy looks very befuddled.

More often than not, I wonder if we lose out on grand opportunities to explore ways to new riches of all kinds because we are struggling with too many knots in our shoelaces. I have to confess, I'm a master at this. I can't make those important phone calls I need to make because I have to wash the dishes. I can't write notes today because I have to clean up the mess of papers in my den. I can't start that new project because I have to stew and worry over the other projects I never got off the ground. I can't accomplish anything today because I'm too upset about the state of the world and my country right now. I can't... because... "I have a knot in my shoelaces." Tell me I'm not the only one who does this kind of putting off, complaining, never getting to the bottom of the real reason for not starting anew – I don't want to take the risk of being rejected, of making a wrong decision, of losing what little ground I have to stand on...

It's risky to step forward rather than back. It's risky to say, "I don't know how this is going to turn out, but I'm going to give it my best shot anyway." It's risky to say to God, "I love you and let me show you how much,"... when we fear the answer might be... "Oh? Really?"

Our passage for today from Matthew comes from the last of the five discourses of Jesus in his ministry as Matthew interprets them. In this discourse the focus is on what's going to happen right before "the end of time." That means, to use a fancy seminary word, it has "eschatological significance" from a theological perspective.

How are people going to get ready for that closing chapter of God's creation? What are they – read we – to do before the book of life is closed and the story is done? Jesus tells a series of parables in this discourse – stories with holy surprise in them... stories that are like "spiritual hand grenades,"^[3] set to go off and bring us up short, or shake some sense into us. "Wake up, people! Get your act together... before it's too late!"

So the wealthy landlord or businessman in this parable – read God – gives some money – read abilities and creative gifts – to each of three of his employees and says, "Make something out of this, will you? I'll be back in a little while – read at the end of time – to see how you've done, in light of what I've given you to work with."

One employee does a lot with what he's been given. Another does something, at least, with what he's been given. And the third does nothing with what he's been given.

The second question of the day might be this: Which of the three employees – read followers of Jesus – might you be? We know who we are. Jesus knows who we are. God knows who we are. Now... what are we going to do with what we've been so generously given to work with?

Maybe it's working hard to get our community into better working shape so we can serve the community in more fruitful ways.

Maybe it's working with others in the community to find new ways to make life more sustainable and less stressful for those in the greatest need in our surrounds.

Maybe it's working on our own spiritual and mental grounding so we feel stronger and more ready to help with the other challenges I've just suggested. There are many more actions and projects we can pursue in the years to come.

In the midst of a worldwide pandemic and a chaotic national time of political unrest and fear, what risks are we *willing to take* to learn to understand one another better? What risks are *too great to take*, like not wearing masks to protect ourselves and one another.

We have choices to make. We have risks to take and risks to avoid. Are we willing, or not, to stake our lives on them... for God's sake? Can God depend on us? Are we trustworthy, or not?

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.....

And pray for our President that he might do the right things in coming weeks and months for the betterment and future of all of us.....

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, 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 22, 2020

Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24; Psalm 100; Ephesians 1:15-23; Matthew 25:31-46

Words to ponder today about “risk”.....

“My colleague Lynn Bauman refers to parables as ‘spiritual hand grenades’; their job is not to confirm but to uproot. You can imagine the effect that had on [Jesus’] audience!”

~ Cynthia Bourgeault, *The Wisdom Jesus, Transforming Heart and Mind – a New Perspective on Christ and His Message*

“If we are ever in doubt about what to do, it is a good rule to ask ourselves what we shall wish on the morrow that we had done.” ~ John Lubbock, 19th century

“When you carry out acts of kindness you get a wonderful feeling inside. It is as though something inside your body responds and says, yes, this is how I ought to feel.”

~ Rabbi Harold Kushner, 20th century

*“All the beautiful sentiments in the world weigh less than a single lovely action.”
~ James Russell Lowell, 19th century*

“I think if the church did what they were supposed to do we wouldn't have anyone sleeping on the streets.” ~ Michael W. Smith, 21st century

“The children of the world do not need more missiles.” ~ Oscar Arias Sanchez, 21st century

“Knowing is not enough; we must apply. Willing is not enough; we must do.”
~ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, 19th century

[1]In *Seasons of the Spirit* for Sunday, November 13, 2011, p. 136.

[2]M. Eugene Boring and Fred B. Craddock, *The People's New Testament Commentary*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009, p. 93.

[3]Lynn Bauman, quoted by Cynthia Bourgeault, *The Wisdom Jesus, Transforming Heart and Mind -- a New Perspective on Christ and His Message*, Boston: Shambhala, 2008, p. 27.