

Good morning from a mostly dark, chilly hill in Rockport....

“Life is made up of the turning of the years. We watch our lives go by, a phase, a stage, a year at a time, and we mark the meaning of the year by the way we feel as we spend it. We talk about ‘the kind of year it’s been.’ As if one year could possibly repeat another, as if all the parts of the year were cut from the same fabric, all its days derived from the same root or developed in the same ways. Instead, every year is a distinct growth point in life, the shedding of another shell of life. Each year brings something unique to us and calls for something different from us....” These words of Sister Joan Chittister, open her book, *The Liturgical Year, the spiraling adventure of the spiritual life*. I usually refer to her words at the change of the seasons of the liturgical year, that’s the year we experience spiritually if we claim to live Christian lives, and follow the Christian seasons.

What Sister Joan reminds me, at the change of the seasons of the Christian year, is that no matter how many unexpected, unwanted, unplanned experiences we have each year in the civic calendar which begins on January 1st each year, we can always go back, or go forward, with the cycles of the seasons of the Christian year, which do not change. They can provide us some comfort, some sense of stability in these chaotic and stressful times. I never paid any attention to these “Christian seasons” prior to going to seminary and entering the ministry in the late 1990’s. The “holidays” were just that – holidays, not seasons, not a time to think about the holy more than the very unsacred “to do lists,” parties, and perhaps too much “jolly juice” and rich food of which many of us partake!

Next Sunday begins the Christian season of Advent, which is the start of the Christian year. This Sunday, today, is known as Christ the King or Reign of Christ Sunday in many churches. Here’s the question I ask as we are on the cusp of the Christian season of Advent: What will this season mean to you this year – will it be sacred and holy, or just one more month of buying and receiving too many presents for those of us who don’t need another thing, too many “to do lists,” and too much commercial tinsel and glitter? Think about it. It’s a choice....

Blessings to each one this early morn..... Susan

p.s. I hope many of you can join me for worship in our sanctuary in a few hours. If not, I do plan to post my sermon later today on both my Facebook page – freerangepastor, and on the church’s Facebook page – the Federated Church of Thomaston.

“You are not far from the kingdom of God”

**A Sermon for the Federated Church of Thomaston
Thomaston, Maine
Sunday, November 21, 2021
Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet
Scripture: Mark 12:28-34**

One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he [Jesus] answered them well, he asked him, “Which commandment is the first of all?” Jesus answered, “The first is, ‘Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” Then the scribe said to him, “You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that ‘he is one, and besides him there is no other’; and ‘to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength,’ and ‘to love one’s neighbor as oneself.’ – this is much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.” When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, “**You are not far from the kingdom of God.**” After that no one dared to ask him any question.
Mark 12:28-34

Will you pray with me. God who reigns over our beloved country, and all the countries of the world, be patient with us when we neglect to follow the commandments Jesus gave to a Jewish scribe so long ago. We forget to love you with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. We forget to love our neighbor. We often seem to stray far, far away from your kind of kingdom. Bring us back into your fold this day, O God. Bring us back to our senses that we might gain a better understanding of what matters to *you*, not *us*, now and in the end. Amen.

This is a little different pre-Thanksgiving message than I would usually offer. It’s more of a message I would deliver for Veterans Day or Memorial Day. But the text I’ve chosen for today, and the increasing violence we are witnessing in our country, pointed me in another direction this week. This is a message about coming near to the kingdom of God.

To begin, a little history lesson about World War I.... I know many of you are more aware of this lesson than I ever could be. “At the 11th hour on the 11th day of the 11th month of 1918, the Great War ends. At 5 a.m. that morning, Germany, bereft of manpower and supplies and faced with imminent invasion, signed an armistice agreement with the Allies in a railroad car outside Compiègne, France. The First World War left nine million soldiers dead and 21 million

wounded, with Germany, Russia, Austria-Hungary, France, and Great Britain each losing nearly a million or more lives. In addition, at least five million civilians died from disease, starvation, or exposure.”^[1] By comparison today, over five million people have died from the covid virus in the past two years and that number continues to grow, especially among those who have not been vaccinated against the virus.

November 11 was originally called Armistice Day because of what happened on this day in 1918. It has been written many times that the First World War was called “The War to End All Wars,” because it was the bloodiest war in history up to that point, and it made many people so sick of war that they hoped no war would ever break out again. That statement has become so profoundly untrue that it would almost be laughable, if it weren’t so tragically true that people seem unable to find peaceful means to settle disputes of many kinds, be they be around racial injustice, political firestorms or social inequality in our country.

To reflect upon all of this, on this Sunday before Thanksgiving, I want to move to a very personal point of view, for the rest of this morning’s sermon. I want to read you a short chapter from *The Forbidden Zone*, written by Mary Borden, who set up a hospital unit on the Western Front during the First World War. For this effort she was awarded the *Croix de Guerre* (Cross of War) by the French Government. She went on to have a distinguished career as a writer, publishing a number of novels and her memoir of her war experiences, the book from which I’ll read. It was first published in 1929. Oh, and another note, Mary Borden was Mary Bok’s grandmother. Most of you probably don’t know Mary. She lives in Quarry Hill now. Mary has been a friend of mine for about twenty years. Mary Bok is a writer herself. She has given me permission to read this chapter in worship services. The chapter is entitled “The Priest and the Rabbi.”^[2]

(read chapter) If you are interested, Mary Borden’s book is still available for purchase at Amazon.com and perhaps in bookstores.

Mary Borden, an American nurse.... a priest and a rabbi giving final comfort to dying soldiers.... and millions of veterans who have given their lives for the sake of peace and freedom for all were “not far from the kingdom of God.” (Mk 12:34)

How far away are we? On this Sunday before Thanksgiving, may we give thanks for all those who have served and died that we might live in safety and with the freedom owed to *all* of us, no matter whether we are Christian or Jew, or white

or black, or politically leaning left or right, or any other strain of the human family. Love God, love your neighbor. It's the beginning and the end of wisdom. It is the bottom line of life. How do I know that? The Bible tells me so. Let the people say, "Amen."

**Federated Church in Thomaston
United Church of Christ United Methodist Church
All Are Welcome
Sunday, November 21, 2021 – Reign of Christ Sunday**

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

*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 Now Thank We all our God (Hymn tune "Nun Danket")

Call to Worship

Pastor: Clothe us, O God, with love and compassion as we worship with thankfulness this day.

People: Dwell in us with your holy word, that we may walk in covenant with you.

All: Speak anew your teachings of old, that our words of thanksgiving may become lives of gratitude. Let us worship God!

***Opening Hymn** "We Gather Together" 131 Blue Hymnal

A Responsive Reading "A Prayer of Thanksgiving" (see insert)

A Moment of Silence

SERVICE OF THE WORD

Scripture Reading Mark 12:28-34

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

Message “You are not far from the kingdom of God” Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet

***Hymn of Meditation** “Sing Praise to God Who Reigns Above” 126 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 For All the Blessings of the Year (,We Thank you, Lord.)

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

***Prayer of Dedication**

***Closing Hymn** “For the Beauty of the Earth” 92 Blue Hymnal

Benediction

Postlude Trumpet Tune -- Raymond H. Haan, from "Organ Suite for Thanksgiving Day"

Revised Common Lectionary Readings for Sunday, November 28, 2021

First Sunday of Advent

Jeremiah 33:14-16; Psalm 25:1-10; 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13; Luke 21:25-36

“The theme of Christianity in relation to other faiths is one that has to be handled carefully, but today there is less excuse than ever for avoiding it. This may be a delicate area, but it is one that must be explored and mapped out if illusions are to be dispelled, suspicions removed, and needless conflicts prevented.”

~ Professor

John Macquarrie, *Union Seminary Quarterly Review*, Vol. XX, No. 1

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 last month.....

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-11/22/21.....6:30 pm: Troop Meeting
Thursday-11/25/21.....Happy Thanksgiving
Sunday-11/28/21.....9:30 am: Worship Service – 1st Sunday of Advent
Suggested Food Pantry Donation.....Canned Vegetables

The flowers this week are given by Corinne Ervin who is thankful for family, friends, Church and many blessings everyday.

Reminders for next Sunday, 11/28/21

Greeter/Usher: Sandra and Lou

Caron

Coffee

Lector: Ja

Host:

net

Dwellely

Flowers: Murie

l Pinkham

Collection Total for Sunday, November 14, 2021:

Pledges - \$ 975.50

Loose - \$ 78.00 (\$50.00 donation re: Carey and Williams)

Total - \$1053.50

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 21, 2021

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

FCT email is thomfedchurch@gmail.com

WiFi password is #1Church

^[1]<http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/world-war-i-ends>

^[2]Mary Bordon, “The Priest and the Rabbi,” *The Forbidden Zone, A Nurse’s Impressions of the First World War*. London: Hesperus Press Limited, 2008. First published, 1929. (available through Amazon.com)