

Good very dark morning from a hill in Rockport....

I've been thinking about anchors throughout the past couple of weeks. These are "persons or things that can be relied on for support, stability, or security; a mainstay.... *'Hope was his only anchor.'*" (from iPhone Dictionary) Maybe it's because of so many deaths occurring recently – some close to me, some not – that my thinking has been drawn again and again to anchors – those in my life, those in the lives of so many others grieving the loss of loved ones, who have anchored us in the acceptance of the reality of death *and* hope for all the days to come....

Who are your anchors? What beliefs are your anchors? What life situations do you/can you call to mind to help anchor you in safe harbors of living, on days when you fall into waters of despair or discouragement or sadness over the recent or distant loss of a loved one?

I wrote in my "Thanksgiving eve meditation" about the fact that not everyone can enjoy the holiday season because of the recent or distant loss of loved ones around the holidays. I believe it is around the holidays of Thanksgiving and Christmas that our faith and our acceptance of the reality of life and death are put to the greatest test. Perhaps this is the time when the "persons or things that can be relied on for support, stability, or security" are most needed to help us stay afloat, to stay put, to stay hopeful as we wait for the new year just over the horizon.

Advent is a time of waiting in the Christian tradition. Advent begins today. And our first focus of Advent is on peace. "Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me" so the song goes which we will sing as our closing hymn this morning. How can each of us be anchors for others in this time of not much peace and a lot of turmoil on many fronts of life for too many people? Come.... be anchors with me, and I believe we will find through our efforts that others will be our anchors, too.... Come.

Blessings to each one this early morn on a late November day. Susan

p.s. I'll try to post my sermon either later today or early tomorrow morning on both my Facebook page (freerangepastor) and the church's Facebook page (the federated church of Thomaston). Some weeks it works, some weeks it doesn't! Cyberspace, to me, is sometimes a fickle friend!

"Come..."

A Sermon for the Federated Church of Thomaston

Thomaston, Maine

Sunday, November 27, 2022

Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet

Scripture: Isaiah 2:1-5

The word that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

In days to **come** the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills;

All the nations shall stream to it.

Many people will **come** and say, '**Come**, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob;

that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.'

For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples;

They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks;

Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

O house of Jacob, **come**, let us walk in the light of the Lord! Isaiah 2:1-5

Will you pray with me. God of the unseen and unexpected, you sent prophets to speak on your behalf long ago. Too often we hear their words as predictions of the future rather than proclamations of your presence among us now. Teach us yet again how to live in the here and now, O God, and to listen to the prophets' words with new openness to their meaning for us in these first days of Advent. Amen.

Well, our theme on this first Sunday of Advent is peace. Such a simple five-letter word, isn't it? It sounds so... nice...

"Peace be with you," Jesus says to his disciples...

"Let there be peace on earth," we'll sing as our closing hymn today.

Peace flags, peace marches, "peace in the valley" from a Christian song written in 1937 for Mahalia Jackson to sing. It was then sung by Red Foley, Elvis Presley, Connie Francis, Johnny Cash, Loretta Lynn, Ronnie Milsap, and others all the way up to Faith Hill^[1]!

Resting at peace, peace of mind, peace and... quiet.... "If I could just get some peace and quiet around here!"

We hear the word so often it loses its punch... its power... its relevance in our world torn up again and again and again by war, violence, prejudice, hatred and ignorance, by politics. Yet, once again, we're called to think about peace as a theme of Advent. We're preparing to celebrate the birth of "the prince of

peace.” Why? Why do we do this every year, when peace seems such an elusive, gauzy, unobtainable state of being? Why not just skip it, since it seems so naïve to think we’ll ever get to a state of worldwide peace? Why think about peace? (get responses)

I think we can’t skip thinking about peace because of one verb: “come.” In our passage from First Isaiah today, written almost 3,000 years ago – which just boggles my mind every time I think about it! – the verb “come” appears four times. In *five* verses “come” appears four times:

“In days to **come** the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established as the highest of the mountains...” (Is 2:2)

“Many peoples shall **come** and say, ‘**Come**, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob...” (Is 2:3)

“O house of Jacob, **come**, let us walk in the light of the Lord.” (Is 2:5)

Get this... IT’S AN INVITATION! COME! Come to the Lord’s house, wherever it is. Come with lots of people. Come and let’s walk up to the holy mountain *together*. Come and let us walk in the light of the Lord.

Why do we have such a hard time with this? Why don’t we want to get with the program and accept the invitation to come and sit together in peace? O.K., I know we pretty much do that right here – for the most part – in Thomaston, in this church. We’re a pretty agreeable bunch, even with all our various backgrounds and differences. We like to come together... for worship, for a coffee/happy hour, for many events in Leach Hall and for a Thanksgiving community dinner in which we invite people to come, to eat, to be at peace together.

But beyond us... why is coming together peacefully such a hard thing to do? For 3,000 years, the invitation from God to come and sit together has been a vital part of the ministry and focus of every major world religion? Why is it hard to do – come together in peace? (get responses)

I don’t really have my own answer to this question. I was looking for yours! But I wonder if it has something to do with where we find meaning – in our daily lives, in our worship practices, in our concern, or lack of concern, for others? Maybe the question we need to ask ourselves, and others, is not, “Do I, or do you, believe in God?”, but this, “Where do I, or do you, find meaning?”

It is often at the time of someone's death that we find meaning in life. It's often after someone has died that I say, "Gee, I wish I'd known those things about them before they died. They were filled with such meaning and I missed a lot of it!"

I participated in the Buddhist memorial service for my dear friend, Margaret Barragato, in Oakland, Maine some years ago. Margaret was a Zen Buddhist priest, along with her husband, Stef. Margaret's memorial service was very, very different from any memorial service we would have here. I won't go into all the details, but we were invited by Peter Wohl, the Zen Buddhist priest, who succeeded Margaret as the priest of their sangha, to participate as we wished – with full bowing all the way to the floor three times in succession at numerous points in the service, with greeting one another with the Buddhist practice of folded hands and a small bow, with chanting, with putting incense to our foreheads singly and then placing it in a burning dish of incense on the alter next to Margaret's place of sitting in the zendo. Then there was a time of sitting, in silence. I don't know how long it was.

As this service began, I thought I would simply watch and respect the actions of others, but not really participate myself... as I'm not a Buddhist... I thought. But as the service went on, *I began to find meaning in the rituals*, so foreign to me personally, but suddenly, or gradually seeming to hold meaning beyond anything I could have imagined. I left that service, having honored Margaret in the ways she would most have liked us to do, and feeling that I had worshiped. I had worshiped in a way I didn't think I could. I left "at peace" with Margaret's death, at peace with myself, and at peace in the midst of finding meaning in a holy service of worship very foreign to my personal experience.

Searching for meaning, finding meaning... Perhaps that's the truest invitation we receive from God, from the Scriptures...

And yet, here and now at the beginning of Advent, and the secular holiday season, do we find meaning? OR do we hear the words so often, repeat the Christmas carols year after year, remember the Advent themes of peace, hope, joy and love with our Advent wreath and its candle lighting each week, year after year, so that pretty soon we're saying under our breaths, or at least in our heads, "Yada, yada, yada," or "Yeah right, whadja get me for Christmas?"

Let's try not to do that this year. Let's find meaning in the season that goes beyond the jingles, and the hype to buy, buy, buy.

Come, find meaning here.

Come, find out what it means to do whatever we can to discover peace and quiet.... not just for ourselves individually, but for all of us together, no matter our religious tradition or none.... no matter anything beyond the fact that we are all children of God, all invited guests to the banquet of life God would have us enjoy together.

Come, and find... Come, and be found...

Let the people say, "Amen."

Federated Church in Thomaston
United Church of Christ United Methodist Church
All Are Welcome
Sunday, November 27, 2022 – 1st Sunday of Advent

Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet, Pastor Alice Billheimer, Organist/ Choir Director
Lector: Sandra Caron

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 Lullaby -- arrangement from music by Mozart

Call to Worship

One: Holy Spirit of Peace, in a world of war and chaos, seen and unseen, in times of trouble and trauma, we dare say, we dare imagine, we dare confess

Many: Yours is the kin-dom, the power, and the glory. Open your ancient words for us. Help our souls imagine your new vision for us.

All: Let us worship God!

***Opening Hymn** "O Day of God, Draw Nigh" #730 Blue Hymnal

Lighting of the Advent Wreath – the Candle of Peace

A Prayer of Thanksgiving (see insert)

A Moment of Silence

SERVICE OF THE WORD

Scripture Reading Isaiah 2:1-5

***Gloria Patri**

Message “Come....” Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet

***Hymn of Meditation** “O Come, O Come Emmanuel” #86 Red 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 Wake, awake, For Night is Flying -- Advent hymn by Philipp Nocola.

Harmonized by J. S. Bach

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

***Prayer of Dedication**

***Closing Hymn** “Let There Be Peace on Earth” #431 Blue Hymnal

Benediction

Postlude In Dulci Jubilo -- Gilbert Martin, from a 15th century melody

Revised Common Lectionary Readings for Sunday, December 4, 2022

2nd Sunday of Advent for

Isaiah 11:1-10; Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19; Romans 15:4-13; Matthew 3:1-12

“Waiting—that cold, dry period of life when nothing seems to be enough and something else beckons within us—is the grace that Advent comes to bring. It stands before us, within us, pointing to the star for which the wise ones from the East are only icons of ourselves. We all

want something more. Advent asked the question, what is it for which you are spending your life? What is the star you are following now?"

~ Joan Chittister, in *The Liturgical*

Year, the Spiraling Adventure of the Spiritual Life

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 all those living through the aftermath of Hurricane Ian and earthquakes everywhere.... And the families and friends of those killed in a gay bar in Colorado Spring this past week....

Please hold in your prayers 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, from Jackie a request for prayers for Kyle Cloudier..and for Joanne Parker’s daughter, who has had brain surgery and is home now!; Enid, Ann Foster, Carol Moss, Julie Pollitt, Zeke Bryant, John Flaherty, Heather Van Buskirk, and for Tiffany, Lucy’s granddaughter... And for Arlene from NH..And for Rev. Wayne Sawyer, And for Amber Thomas.... And for James Armstrong and family... And Dale O’Neal (Kristen O’Neal’s husband who has tonsil cancer). And Jeffrey Northgraves who is receiving treatment for lung cancer. And for Lucy still recovering from a fall.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Sunday-12/4/22.....9:30 am: Communion
Service10:30 am: Coffee Time

Suggested Food Pantry Donation.....Baked Beans

Deacon for December, 2022: Dave Billheimer and Doug Schroeder

Reminders for next Sunday, December 4, 2022

Greeter/Usher: Claudia Rosti and Richard

Kortright

Coffee

Host:

Lector: Jackie

Harjula

Flowers: Nance Brown

Collection Total for Sunday, November 20, 2022:

Pledges -

\$355.00

Loose

- \$ 31.00

Total - \$386.00

The 2022 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 27, 2022

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

To contact the pastor via e-mail: freerangepastor@gmail.com

WiFi password is #1Church

^[1]http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peace_in_the_Valley