

Good chilly morning from a hill in Rockport!

It's a triple header in our sanctuary this morning! This is "stewardship Sunday." We will share in Holy Communion, as it's the first Sunday of the month. And it's the second Sunday in Advent, for which our theme is "peace."

Stewardship Sunday is the day in December on which we each make our pledge as to how we will support our church financially in the coming year. A pledge is a promise, a vow.... to do something, to commit one's time, energy and often money to some cause. We recite the Pledge of Allegiance to our country. We pledge our lives to one another in marriage. We pledge our financial commitment to the church we hold dear. A pledge is not a requirement – EVERYONE and ANYONE is welcome in our church, no matter whether they make a pledge of financial support or not! But financial pledges – no matter their amount -- are important for this reason – they proclaim that we will "put our money where our mouth is" as we support our church and its offerings to the community.

This morning some of us will put our paper pledges of support in the offering plates indicating the amount of financial support we pledge to give over the months in 2022. Others may send in their pledges by mail to: The Federated Church of Thomaston, 8 Hyler Street, Thomaston, ME 04861, attention: Gerry Zwick. Whether you are an "official" member of the church, or not, we invite you to pledge your financial support to our church, if you are so inclined.

On this second Sunday in Advent, here's the question – to whom, and for what purpose, have you given your pledge of support, in the past, and now into the future? Think about that.....

I hope to see many of you in church this morning..... Blessings to each one this cold morn....

Susan

"...to give light to those who sit in darkness"
A Sermon for the Federated Church of Thomaston
Thomaston, Maine
Sunday, December 5, 2021
Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet
Scripture: Luke 1:67-80

Then his [John the Baptist's] father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke this prophecy: "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has looked

favorably on his people and redeemed them. He raised up a mighty savior for us in the house of his servant David, as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us.

Thus he has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors, and has remembered his holy covenant, the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham, to grant us that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins.

By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

The child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day he appeared, publicly to Israel.

Luke 1:67-80

Will you pray with me. Powerful and amazing God, sometimes we refuse to be amazed. We'd rather be right than amazed. We'd rather be sure of ourselves than in awe of your wondrous doings in our world and in our daily lives. Open us in these moments to share Zechariah's holy surprise at your gift of a son, one who would play a crucial role in the ministry of Jesus. Open our eyes, unplug our ears, and give us the tongues to proclaim your mysterious miracles in our unbelieving world. Amen.

“The prophecy of Zechariah [in our reading for this morning] is a text of blessing and commissioning. Zechariah weaves quotes and images from Israel's prophets into his own declaration of God's reign: ‘light to those who sit in the shadow of death’ from Isaiah; ‘the dawn from on high will break upon us’ from Malachi. In Zechariah's words, we are invited to perceive John, [who will become known as John the Baptist], as the next of Israel's prophets, [and the proclaimer of Jesus' coming into the world as Savior].

But not to be overlooked in these verses from Luke is the voice of a father blessing his child. Zechariah finally comes to see John, [his own flesh and blood], as a gift from God. He sings, once he's been given back his voice, of that gift as a prophetic call for the sake of a whole people.”^[1]

I've not had children, so I certainly can't profess to know the feelings of a parent upon the birth of their precious baby son or daughter. I know many of you

know those feelings. I do believe the birthing of a baby is a unique moment unlike any other. To bring new life into the world, whether you're a young couple, or an aged couple as Zechariah and Elizabeth were!, it must be an overwhelming feeling of joy, of hope, of peace and of love.

Joy in the arrival of this new bundle of life,
hope in the wonder of what this child will accomplish,
peace in the knowledge of the sacredness of this little body,
and love of the most fervent kind shining out of those new eyes....

I see it in the midst of baptizing a baby.... the newness, the wonder, the promise of good things to come from this little soul who knows to long only for the tenderness of touch, and the nourishment of love in all forms.

Zechariah's blessing upon his baby son John, who would come to be called John the Baptist, and become the herald, the proclaimer of Jesus' ministry and divinity, is the blessing of God upon us all. For *we* were once born, *we* were once touched, *we* were once a bundle of life to be nourished and raised up to goodness.

And so what do we do with this blessing of a baby boy by an ancient ancestor of ours, ancient in age and in wisdom? (get responses)

Zechariah proclaims in his blessing that his son John will give witness to God's promise to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace." (Luke 1:79)

Last Sunday, the first Sunday in Advent, the question Kathleen and Ron asked us at the end of their words about hope were these – where do we find hope in the world? This morning, the question asked of us was where do we find peace in the world? What do you think? Where do we find hope and peace in the world today? (get responses)

I want to read you one of the responses that came back to us after the Thanksgiving dinner last week.... as a response to where we find hope and peace right here. "I just wanted to thank you for your church's generosity this Thanksgiving. My family had three meals out of the delicious food that you provided, which really blessed us during our stressful move. My three year old son now LOVES green peas! The most wonderful gift you gave me was to see the love of Christ on the smiling faces that greeted me. As I was driving up to your church to pick up the meals, three teenagers smiled and helped me with all the love and the care in the world. That will always be a memory I will hold in my heart. Thank you for being the hands and feet of Jesus."

These words are the evidence of hope and peace in the world right here in Thomaston. These are words of a young mother who was given the strength to go on in the midst of challenging days ahead by way of a turkey dinner for her family.

These are the words of affirmation that filter all the way back to Zechariah and Elizabeth at the birth of their son John. Zechariah's blessing of baby John is the same blessing of a mother who's three year old son now LOVES peas as a result of the sustenance given and served with love through the commitment of a group of Thomaston residents. These folks do not ask for compensation or reward or recognition beyond the joy coming from those who have received of their generosity of time, of energy, of a Thanksgiving dinner....

In the midst of all that is wrong, all that is stressful, all that is divisive and overwhelming in our country and world today, there is hope, there is peace, there is a little boy who now LOVES peas because of the eagerness of spirit and body by those who want to do unto others as they would have it be done to them.

Zechariah blessed his baby son John, and *we* are blessed through his affirmation of the presence of God in all of life – in the midst of doubts and fear, the good and the bad, the peace bearing and hope filled events of each day, and the challenging stresses of life. May we move through the rest of Advent knowing we are not alone. God is with us – in the bread and the fruit of the vine of holy communion, in the generosity we extend to others and receive from them, and in the light that shines without dimming in all the darkness around us.

Let the people say, "Amen."

Federated Church in Thomaston
United Church of Christ United Methodist Church
All Are Welcome
Sunday, December 5, 2021 – Second Sunday in Advent

Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet, Pastor Alice Billheimer, Organist/ Choir Director
Lector: Jackie Harjula

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 O Jesu Sweet, O Jesu Mild -- J. S. Bach (arr by George Blake)

Call to Worship

Pastor: We come seeking the peace that passes all understanding.

People: We come looking for signs of peace in the midst of chaos and challenge.

All: We come with expectation, longing and hope. Let us worship God!

***Opening Hymn** "O God of Love, O King of Peace" 262 Red Hymnal

Lighting of the second candle in Advent for peace....

A Responsive Reading "A Person Could Stand Up" (see insert)

A Moment of Silence

SERVICE OF THE WORD

Scripture Reading Luke 1:67-80

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

Message "To give light to those who sit in darkness" Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet

***Hymn of Meditation** "For the Bread, Which Thou Hast Broken" 214 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 What Child is This -- based on the English song "Greensleeves."

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

***Prayer of Dedication**

A Service of Holy Communion (see insert)

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

Benediction

Postlude To God Be The Glory (tune by W. H. Doane in a setting by Charles Sergisson.

Revised Common Lectionary Readings for Sunday, December 12, 2021
3rd Sunday in Advent
Zephaniah 3:14-20; Isaiah 12:2-7; Philippians 4:4-7; Luke 3:7-18

***“When the power of love overcomes the love of power
the world will know peace.”***
~ Jimi Hendrix

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-12/6/21.....6:30 pm: Troop Meeting
Sunday-12/12/21.....9:30 am: Worship Service – 3rd Sunday of Advent
Suggested Food Pantry Donation.....Peanut Butter

The flowers this week are given by Arlene and Chandler Woodman in loving memory of their parents, brothers, sisters and other loved ones.

Reminders for next Sunday, 12/12/21
Deacon for December: Dave Billheimer and Doug Schroeder
Greeter/Usher: Kay
Sylvester
Host:
lice
Billheimer
Dwelley

Coffee
Lector: A
Flowers: Janet

Collection Total for Sunday, November 28, 2021:

Pledges - \$ 790.00

Loose - \$ 411.00 (includes \$30.00 in memory of Harriet Williams and \$25.00 for TGS)

Total - \$1201.00

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, December 5, 2021

8 Hyler Street, Thomaston, Maine 04861 (207) 354-6105
To contact the pastor via e-mail: freerangepastor@gmail.com
WiFi password is #1Church

^[1]From *Seasons of the Spirit* for Sunday, December 10, 2006, p. 44.