

Some days the pastor just has to say, “Uncle!” Those are the days when the spirit is willing, but the body says ‘no’. Thanks to each of you who sent me ‘get better’ wishes over these past two days..... Those of you who get sick headaches know how they can cause a person to take to their bed until the pain subsides.... I’m back. Headache gone and spirit and body are willing once again!

One of the few things I did manage to read in these past two days was Garrison Keillor’s “The Writer’s Almanac” on line. It shows up in my “new mail” box most days. If you’re not a subscriber already, I recommend you become one – if you love words, reading about writers of words, and Keillor’s delightful birthday biographies of writers. The best thing this almanac offers, it seems to me, is the opportunity – no the reminder – that we each have a story to tell about our lives. Keillor is a master at relating the life stories of people in a few paragraphs– some whom we know because they are famous for one reason or another, others whom we didn’t know existed, but discover are fascinating through the words of Keillor’s biographies of them. This leads me to think about the obituaries I read most days in the daily papers, and the stories I learn about people in meeting with their families after they have died. Always, either I, or someone attending their memorial services, has said, “Gee, I sure wish I’d known that about them when they were alive!” I’ve heard those words more times than I can count. What stories about yourself don’t others know? What stories about others would you like to know? Ask.....

Speaking of the Bible..... now there’s a book with stories upon stories about the lives of our sacred ancestors! We learn of the “heroes,” and the “bad apples,” the high and mighty, and the lowly unnamed souls.... all living out their days with some successes and some regrets.... each one reminding us that we have a role to play in this great drama called life.

I’ll copy below, and tape later today and post on Facebook, the sermon I would have delivered this past Sunday had I not taken to my bed with a hot sock on my head for two days! Read, and/or watch, if you like.... but I know many are in the throws of holiday preparations, etc., on this 14th day of December.

Even though it’s not in the bulletin, I’ll remind you that this coming Sunday we will be thanking the Boy Scouts for all their good and loyal efforts through our church for a number of years. They will be ending their scout days with us come the end of December. We will wish them well and have goodies with them in our coffee hour right after church.

Also, if you would like to make a donation via the United Methodist Church, to help the survivors of the horrific and devastating tornadoes that ravaged Kentucky this past weekend, go to: advance.umcmmission.org. The Advance number is 901670. Advance is part of the Global Ministries, The United Methodist Church.

Blessings to each one this early Tuesday morning..... Susan

“What should we do?”

A Sermon for the Federated Church of Thomaston

Thomaston, Maine

Sunday, December 12, 2021

Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet

Scripture: Luke 3:7-18

John said to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruits worthy of repentance. Do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our ancestor’; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”

And the crowds asked him, “**What then should we do?**” In reply he said to them, “Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise.” Even tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, “Teacher, **what should we do?**” He said to them, “Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you.” Soldiers also asked him, “And we, **what should we do?**” He said to them, “Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages.”

As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, John answered all of them by saying, “I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people.”

Will you pray with me. Challenging God, you remind us of a wild and crazy preacher today. He insults people and they keep listening. Instead of showing him the way out the door, they ask him what they should do? Help us to keep our ears open, O God, even when we don't like the words of the prophet. Help us to keep asking what we should do, no matter how many checks we've written or how many boxes of food we've stuffed. Help us to find new energy in the midst of too much to do and joy in the midst of hard discipleship. Amen.

John the Baptist is one gutsy preacher! If I started out a sermon with the words, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?”, you would probably begin whispering amongst yourselves that you thought I’d been working too hard. If I tried it again the next Sunday, you would probably be thinking twice about coming to church the third Sunday, and maybe calling for a pastoral review for your preacher.

Yes, John the Baptist is a gutsier preacher than I am, and he got away with it for a little while. But if you’ve read the rest of the story, you know he lost his head, literally, in the midst of his ministry. And today, the third Sunday of Advent on which we are called to think about “joy,” we are also asked to ponder the preaching of this crazy guy in the wilderness who called his parishioners a “brood of vipers.”

It’s a strange mix of themes and stories, but perhaps no more strange than the themes and stories of the daily news reports of our time. Some days I think the only real difference between people and daily life now from Jesus’ day is we have electricity and indoor plumbing and they didn’t. For all the rest, we have acts of kindness and great generosity occurring beside acts of immoral judgment and power-seeking, just as back then. We have stables of safe haven and hot soup beside locations of terrible poverty and injustice, just as back then. The human condition is filled with actions of unspeakable shame *and* amazing generosity.

Maybe John the Baptist had already figured that out. Maybe he knew he could get away with calling his hearers a “brood of vipers,” just to get their attention, because he also knew deep down inside of them there was something redeemable. Maybe he saw there were sparks of goodness, flickers of the light of God that refused to go out, even in people who seemed to be deaf to what he was trying to tell them – about God, and the one who was coming to show them the way to new and better life.

It’s hard to read our passage for today and not take note of the question asked. Do you remember what it is? (get responses) Upon hearing John’s accusation, each of three different groups of hearers asked, “What should we do?” (Lk 3:10, 12, 14) First it was “the crowds.” And John said to them, “Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise.” (Lk 3:11) I think “the crowds,” for the most part, are us. Generosity is to become our watchword. Giving to others, particularly to those in the greatest need, is to be our daily task.

Second John heard the question from the tax collectors, an outcaste group of people back then. Would we call them “the IRS” today? Maybe. But maybe, too, they are business people, corporations, governments who take more than they need to stay afloat in business, who carry out corrupt and greedy practices. John said to them, “Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you.” (Lk 3:13) Do your business right. Don’t cut corners. Always be fair and honest in your transactions.

Third John heard the question from soldiers, another outcaste group in Jesus’ day, and perhaps a surprising group to be included among John’s hearers. And he answered them, “Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages.” (Lk 3:14) Don’t lord your power over others. Don’t persecute those whom you are supposed to protect. Don’t expect to be paid millions when you and many others can live on a whole lot less.

John the Baptist came and baptized people – no matter who they were, or where they were on life’s journey – and called them to repent of their sins and go forward doing good things. He called them to turn their backs on selfishness and greed, immoral and unjust behaviors, and power hungry motives. He called them to turn around and see God’s kingdom of goodness and generosity and well being right before their eyes, perhaps even in one another.

Our passage for today ends with these words, “So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people.” (Lk 3:18) There is the joy in the message, my friends. “He proclaimed the good news to the people.” It seems so simple, and yet we try to make it so hard to believe and carry out.

When individuals decide they want to officially join the church we ask them three questions, but one in particular relates directly to John the Baptist’s exhortation to his hearers so long ago. I ask, “Do each of you promise, by the grace of God, to be Christ’s disciples, to follow in the way of Christ to resist oppression and evil, to show love and justice, and to witness to the work and word of Jesus Christ as best you are able?” The “correct” answer to that question is, “I promise, with the help of God.”

In the heart of that question lays the “good news,” the challenging, but amazing joy of the faith-filled life. It is as the prophet Micah put it centuries before Jesus’ birth when the Israelites asked, “With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high?” (Micah 6:6) And the prophet Micah responded, “He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8)

It's really very simple, the answer to the question, "What should we do?" Do justice, love kindness, walk humbly with God. May we strive to not complicate the "good news" this day.

Let the people say, "Amen."

Federated Church in Thomaston
United Church of Christ United Methodist Church
All Are Welcome
Sunday, December 12, 2021 – Third Sunday in Advent

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

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 Love Came Down at Christmas -- carol based on a traditional Irish melody

Call to Worship (based on Philippians 4:4-7)

Pastor: Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!

People: Let our gentleness be known to everyone. Let us not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let our requests be made known to God;

All: and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding will bring us joy this day. Let us worship God!

***Opening Hymn** "Joyful, Joyful" 89 Blue Hymnal

Lighting of the third candle in Advent for joy....

A Responsive Reading "The Demand of Yesterday" (see insert)

A Moment of Silence

SERVICE OF THE WORD

Scripture Reading Luke 3:7-18

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

Message “What then should we do?” Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet

***Hymn of Meditation** “Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus” 196 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 'Twas on the Moon of Wintertime -- "The Huron Carol"

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

***Prayer of Dedication**

***Closing Hymn** “Joy to the World” 246 Blue Hymnal

Benediction

Postlude Angels We Have Heard On High --Based on the hymn tune "Gloria in Excelsis Deo"

Revised Common Lectionary Readings for Sunday, December 19, 2021

4th Sunday in Advent

Micah 5:2-5a; Luke 1:46b-55; Hebrews 10:5-10; Luke 1:39-45

*“There is no getting to Bethlehem and the sweet baby in the manger
without first hearing the rough prophet in the wilderness
call us to repentance...”*

~ Kathy Beach-Verhey, Presbyterian minister, in *Feasting on the Word*, Year C, Volume 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 Whirty, 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-12/13/21.....6:30 pm: Troop Meeting

Thursday-12/16/21.....11:00 am: Women’s Group Meeting

Sunday-12/19/21.....9:30 am: Worship Service – 4th Sunday of Advent ...Coffee Time after the Service – Please come join us

Suggested Food Pantry Donation.....Cereal

The flowers this week are given by Janet Dwelley in honor of her husband, Dan Merrill, for his birthday.

Reminders for next Sunday, 12/19/21

Greeter/Usher: Kay Sylvester

Coffee

Host: Janet Dwelley Lector: Janet

Dwelley

Flo

wers: Gwen Alex

Collection Total for Sunday, December 5, 2021:

Pledges -	\$2741.00
Loose -	\$ 173.00
Deacons' Sunday -	\$ 31.47
Total -	\$2945.47

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 12, 2021

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

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

WiFi password is #1Church