

Good Sunday morning from a sunny, windy hill in Rockport.....

“One of the most dedicated participants in the bus protest in Montgomery, Alabama, was an elderly Negro whom we affectionately called Mother Pollard. Although poverty-stricken and uneducated, she was amazingly intelligent and possessed a deep understanding of the meaning of the movement. After having walked for several weeks, she was asked if she were tired. With ungrammatical profundity, she answered, ‘My feets is tired, but my soul is rested.’”

~ from a sermon by Martin Luther King, Jr., in his book of sermons, *Strength to Love*. If you read one book this year, in the midst of the racial outrage all around us, make it be this one.....

It is hard for me this morning to think of something light and cheery and upbeat to meditate upon, lest it be the bright red male Cardinal feeding at the suet block hanging on our deck just beyond our living room window at this very moment. As I type, I’m watching him, so stunning in the sunlight, chipping away at the suet while a mild breeze causes the feeder to sway....

This morning, “Mother Pollard’s” words and this Cardinal are all I have to offer by way of meditation.... except for the simple worship service below.....

Blessings to all this Spring morn..... Susan

p.s. You will note the sermon below is not single-spaced! I had one of my readers tell me recently they liked the double-spacing of the sermon – made it easier to read! So, here below again, the sermon double-spaced!

p.p.s. I have downloaded this morning’s scripture reading and sermon to my facebook page: freerangepastor for anyone who wants to tune in..... and I believe Margie is also downloading my sermon to Federated’s Facebook page....

p.p.p.s. A few of you have taken me up on my offer to come chat with you in your yard or open garage, on your porch or deck, etc..... wearing one of my many masks, bringing my own libation, and carrying my own lawn chair.... and maybe bug net, too! Be in touch if you’re interested – call me at 207-322-1948 or send me an e-mail to freerangepastor@gmail.com.....

**A simple online worship service for Sunday, May 31, 2020 -- Pentecost
as prepared by Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet
Pastor of the Federated Church of Thomaston**

Opening Prayer

Fashion us, O God, with divine imagination!
Mold us with sacred intention!
Change us with your compassion!
Transform us with joy, even in this tumultuous time!
Birth us again, anew. Live through us this day.
Let us worship God,
not beside one another in physical space this day,
but always together in time and spirit.
Amen.

A Simple Prayer

"If Love Be There"

by Robert Weston (adapted)

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This day,

I will set aside all that divides me from others.

This day,

I will remember that the world is beautiful to the one
who is willing that it be so
and that into the open, eager heart,
the beauty enters in if love be there.

This day,

I will make a part of the song of life.

There may be grief
but if there be love, it will be overcome.

There may be pain
but it can be borne with dignity and courage.

There may be difficulty
but it can be turned to strength.
Remembering that the world is beautiful
I will let it be so for others whom I meet.

This day,

I will be a part of the song of life.

Amen.

A Reading of Scripture – Acts 2:1-21

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine."

But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: 'In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day. Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'" Acts 2:1-21

A sermon based on Acts 2:1-21
"all together in one place"

Will you pray with me. Amazing, surprising God, remind us of the true meaning of Pentecost today. Help us to remember we *are* the church Jesus came to inspire us to start, even though he himself was a devout Jew. Teach us to be the church you would have us be in the best ways in these hard times. Tap us with your Holy Spirit this day, O God, for we long to be touched and sent out to do your will in our tender world that is hurting now in so many ways. Amen.

I've mentioned before that I heard Archbishop Desmond Tutu speak some years back at a preaching conference in Atlanta. He started out by saying, "When I get up to preach I always remember the story about the old minister who had gone to bed with his wife. As they lay there in the dark, she took his hand and said, 'Oh honey, I can't sleep. Preach me one of your sermons.'" Then Archbishop Tutu and all of us laughed and laughed, and all knew it was true – we work hard not to put our congregations to sleep each Sunday. Some days that's a real challenge, depending on the Scriptural text we're talking about and depending on our preparation and skill in delivery! There's a term thrown about in clergy circles – it's the "Saturday night special" – and it's not about a firearm of any kind. It's about sermons written on late Saturday nights to be delivered in less than twelve hours!

I was taught in seminary it's o.k. to use some humor and to tell a joke infrequently in a sermon, but Archbishop Tutu obviously had different instruction in the craft of sermon writing, because his sermon was full of jokes and stories and fun. It was also full of the wisdom and goodness and grace of God. If there was ever a man full of the Spirit of God, it is Desmond Tutu. It was a gift just to be in the presence of the man and most likely a once in a lifetime experience for me.

One of his stories was about one of his grandchildren. He said not long ago his wife was standing next to one of them while the little boy was signing pieces of paper and handing them back to other children. She asked him what he was doing, and he said, "I'm signing autographs." She said, "Why are you doing that?" He said, "Grandpa signs autographs." She said, "Yes, but your Grandpa has done many things." He said, "What has Grandpa done?"

Now Grandma Tutu probably didn't launch into a lecture about how Grandpa is one of the most well-known and respected world wide peacemakers of modern times, but in the innocence of childhood we can see the gift of modeling behavior, even if it is slightly displaced as it was for Archbishop Tutu's grandson.

And on the day of Pentecost, we are reminded of the importance of modeling behavior –

- the behavior that demonstrates the best of the best of the Christian church –
- the all inclusive call to people of every nation, every tongue, every race to meet and converse in the language of God –
- the language of God that surpasses all knowledge and trumps all our differences in doctrine, in action, in faith –
- so we might truly begin to understand one another.

That seems like a pipe dream right now, doesn't it? With violence erupting this past week after the horrific treatment and death of an African American man in Minneapolis by a police officer with his fellow officers standing by and watching, with the effects of a deadly virus continuing to rampage through our country and world, with our political figures at odds day in and day out.

I don't know about you, but for me it is hard to imagine the scene of that first Pentecost after Jesus' death. Do we really think a time will come again when we will truly understand one another, listen to one another even if we speak different languages, and accept one another for whoever we are?

That first Pentecost took place when the Holy Spirit of God descended on this group of people from many nations who had come together in one place in Jerusalem for the annual "Festival of Weeks," the spring barley harvest. This was a Jewish festival. "When the Jews were no longer an agriculture-based society, the rabbis gave the festival a new meaning, a commemoration of the giving of the Law of Moses on Mount Sinai. God shaped a new people through the establishing of a covenant."^[1]

On *this* particular Pentecost, as it is detailed in our reading from the Book of Acts for today, something new and very strange happened. "As *we* celebrate Pentecost, it is important to keep in mind that we are telling the story of a *particular* day. It is not that God's Spirit had never been given before. Throughout scripture, we hear the story of how God has come near to humankind, strengthening and encouraging those who walk in God's ways. But in this instance, the community was empowered in a new way. The Christian community began with an event celebrating God's Spirit, present with the people. This community is then empowered by the Spirit to move out into the world, doing God's work and telling the good news [of Jesus] to all."^[2]

Would that it were that simple then or today. The Book of Acts offers many details of how things went in the earliest church, before there was doctrine, before there were mega-churches, before there were denominations all offering their own interpretation of what Jesus "*really* meant."

If you've read the entire Book of Acts, and I recommend that you do, you know things did not always go smoothly in those first church committee meetings, coffee hours, and events like the ones we hold in this church. There was dissention. There were splits. There were disagreements about how the ministry of the young church should work.

Yet, through it all, there was God's Holy Spirit reminding the people again and again of the reason for the existence of this new group of followers of those who

would come to call themselves Christians. The reason was, and remains, Jesus – his ministry, his healings, his proclamations of the holy power of God in one’s life, his willingness to lay down his life for the sake of others, his love for God and for all those he touched then and touches now.

I witnessed the healing power of Jesus’ love and touch several years ago in the action of a little girl whose family doesn’t even go to church. Standing in Seaview Cemetery in Rockport, I was officiating a graveside memorial service for a young woman who had died all too soon. I watched her daughter, little seven-year-old Lainey, minister to her grieving daddy and all who were present there with her beside her mommy’s new grave. Peter, her daddy, bent down to be on her level, and she reached up and took his glasses off and wiped the tears from his eyes with a Kleenex. Then she put his glasses back on and smiled. It was a poignant moment that brought me back to some of Jesus’ words of children.

From the Gospel of Mark, Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.” [And Mark tells us] Jesus took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.” (Mk 10:14-16) At this graveside service, Peter and I and all who were grieving the loss of Lainey’s mother, Kellee, were invited into the kingdom of God and blessed by this little child who understood the power of love, the power in taking a simple action to dry her daddy’s tears.

There was a dove release at Kellee’s graveside. First a lovely white wicker basket was opened by Kellee’s mom and dad and three white doves flew up into the tree shading the graveside where we stood. Then Lainey, with her daddy’s help, opened a second basket and another white dove flew out and up into the tree where the first three were waiting for it. Then they all flew off westward toward Washington, Maine, where they “home.” You see, the first three doves wouldn’t fly home until the fourth one was with them.

On this day of Pentecost, we are invited to fly home, but not alone, not without someone at our side to dry the tears from our eyes.

On this day of Pentecost, we are given the opportunity to share in one another’s burdens, even when we cannot be together in person.

On this day of Pentecost, we are called to try again and again to understand one another, no matter who we are or where we are in life’s journey in the midst of renewed racial strife in our country and in the midst of this worldwide pandemic.

On this day of Pentecost, we are encouraged to be one in spirit, even if we are not of one mind, or one religion, or one political party, or one color. We are in this stormy, chaotic time together whether we like one another or not.

Our call as people of faith is to wait for and with one another, to wait for and with all others in need of God's mercy and grace so we might fly into God's kingdom together, one in the Spirit.

Let the people say, "Amen."

To hold in our prayers this day.....

Please hold in your prayers all those affected by the coronavirus and the families of those who have died from the virus.... and all those affected, which should be every one of us, by the cruel and senseless death of George Floyd....

Also, Galo let me know yesterday that Eve Anderson has died. Galo told me Eve "was raised Jewish but not religious, but she was also humble and intelligent and knew not to question the higher authority, and just because we don't see God doesn't mean he's not there."

Muriel let me know several weeks ago, and I have neglected to pass this sad news on – that Charlies "Charlie" Boon died, a man many of you knew and loved.

May all who knew Eve and Charlie and George Floyd be comforted by the knowledge that each life is sacred in its being born, in its living and in its dying. Blessed be each of them....

From our most recent bulletin and more....

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, Muriel's grandson Jared, and Jackie's 92 year old friend Genevieve Micali.... *Please send me the names of those you would like for me to add to this list next Sunday!*

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 believe that God, the creator,
Jesus, the redeemer, and
the Holy Spirit, the sustainer,*

will be with us no matter the length of our days.

Amen.

*adapted from the words of Henri Auriel

Readings from the RCL (Revised Common Lectionary)

for Sunday, June 7, 2020 – Trinity Sunday

Genesis 1:1-2:4a; Psalm 8; 2 Corinthians 13:11-13; Matthew 28:16-20

Words to ponder today.....

“Meaning in the Bible is plural, not singular, and we are not all on the same page of the Bible... or of life.” ~ Barbara Brown Taylor, Episcopal priest, professor, and writer

*“Few words in the New Testament more clearly and solemnly express the magnanimity of Jesus’ spirit than that sublime utterance from the cross, ‘Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.’ This is love at its best.”
~ Martin Luther King, Jr., from his book of sermons, *Strength to Love**

[1]From *Seasons of the Spirit Congregational Life for Lent-Easter*, May 31, 2009, p. 132.

[2]Ibid.