

Good Sunday morning from a cloudy hill in Rockport.....

The beat goes on, doesn't it? More new cases of a deadly virus, more disagreements among us giving way to violence in some places, more uncertainty about the future in our country and around the world.... Oh boy.... It's hard to be hopeful, isn't it? But we have to be hopeful. We have to cling to the wheat of us while we wade through the weeds of us....

Congressman John Lewis, who died yesterday, would want us to hold on and keep moving. I didn't know all that much about Congressman Lewis before yesterday. But I'm learning. I just ordered his book *Across That Bridge, A Vision for Change and the Future of America*. From its pages:

“You are a light. You are the light. Never let anyone—any person or any force—dampen, dim or diminish your light. Study the path of others to make your way easier and more abundant. Lean toward the whispers of your own heart, discover the universal truth, and follow its dictates... Release the need to hate, to harbor division, and the enticement of revenge. Release all bitterness. Hold only love, only peace in your heart, knowing that the battle of good to overcome evil is already won. Choose confrontation wisely, but when it is your time don't be afraid to stand up, speak up, and speak out against injustice. And if you follow your truth down the road to peace and the affirmation of love, if you shine like a beacon for all to see, then the poetry of all the great dreamers and philosophers is yours to manifest in a nation, a world community, and a Beloved Community that is finally at peace with itself.”

Can we do it? Can we be the light that seems to be shinning so dimly in our country in these hard moments of time?

A reminder about our “ice cream sandwich social” this afternoon at 3 p.m. in the church parking lot, or more likely Leach Hall.... Here are your instructions for this afternoon in order to keep us all safe and healthy will enjoying some time together!

~ Wear your mask (except when you're eating your ice cream!)....

~ Stay six feet apart from one another....

~ We will only gather for a half hour to limit the amount of time we are exposed to one another.....

And if you're too far away to join us, buy yourself an ice cream sandwich and enjoy it with us in spirit this afternoon in Thomaston!

Blessings to all this cloudy Sunday morning of Summer..... Susan

p.s. I will download this morning's scripture reading and sermon to my Facebook page shortly: [freerangepastor](#) for anyone who wants to tune in..... and I believe Margie is also downloading my sermon to Federated's Facebook page....

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.....

p.p.p.s *Thank you to those of you who send me your e-mail responses to my writings. I don't always get a chance to write back to each one of you, but I appreciate all your responses! They keep me motivated to keep writing.....*

**A simple online worship service for Sunday, July 19, 2020
as prepared by Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet
Pastor of the Federated Church of Thomaston**

Opening Prayer

Here in this space heaven and earth touch,
even though we are only together in spirit, not in bodily space.

Here in this place, the gateway to grace is wide open.

For here, in this space, we come to worship
and God enfolds us close in welcoming embrace,
even when we cannot hold one another in physical embrace.

God declares, "I am with you."

Come enter into this sacred space,
come enter into God's warm embrace,
come be held in this community of grace,
even in the folds of these moments of cyberspace.

We are all welcome here.

Amen.

A prayer of request....

Lord, Lord, Open Unto Me!
Open unto me — light for my darkness.
Open unto me — courage for my fear.
Open unto me — hope for my despair.
Open unto me — peace for my turmoil.

Open unto me — joy for my sorrow.
Open unto me — strength for my weakness.
Open unto me — wisdom for my confusion.
Open unto me — forgiveness for my sins.
Open unto me — love for my hates.
Open unto me — thy Self for my self.
Lord, Lord, open unto me!

by Howard Thurman (1899-1981),
African American author, philosopher, theologian, educator, and civil rights leader

A Reading of Scripture – Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

[Jesus] put before them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, ‘Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?’ He answered, ‘An enemy has done this.’ The slaves said to him, ‘Then do you want us to go and gather them?’ But he replied, ‘No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at the harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.’”

13:24-30

Matthew

Then [Jesus] left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples approached him, saying, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field.” He answered, “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!”

hew 13:36-43

Matt

A sermon based on Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43
“Where did these weeds come from?”

Pray with me. Wise God, you show us the way into your kingdom and we so often misread your signs. Help us think about the parable of the wheat and the weeds in new ways, that we might find both direction and consolation in its message. Amen.

Many commentaries and explanations of the parable of the weeds have been written. It has “many facets, but we can surely see, shimmering behind it, the experience of Matthew’s church – and ours, too. [Again and again] it comes as a shock to find that the world, [that the society in which we live,] that the families into which we were born, that even the church is not an entirely trustworthy place.

The world has places of wonder, but alleys of cruelty, too. [We have only to think of the amazing work of people like Mother Teresa and civil rights leaders like John Lewis *and* the horrifying events of 9/11, and brutality of many kinds in our country and world to be conscious of this duality.]

Families cause deep pain as well as great joy. [We have only to think about families torn apart by addictions and abuses of all kinds *and* the exquisite experiences of forgiveness and love that can bring families together in times of crisis or death.]

The church can be inspiringly courageous one moment and petty and faithless the next. [We have only to think of the work of both the United Church of Christ and the United Methodist Church to stand up for those who are discriminated against because of their color or sexual orientation *and* the unwillingness of some Christians to be open to the Spirit in ways beyond their immediate and personal understanding of their faith.]

[No doubt about it,] bad mixes in with the good. ‘Where did these weeds come from?’ is a perennial human cry.”^[1]

One commentator of this text writes: “When the master in the parable forbids the servants to go and weed out the field, this is not to be interpreted as a call to passivity in the face of evil. It is not a divine command to ignore injustice in the world, violence in society, or wrong in the church. It is, rather, a realistic reminder that the servants [that’s us] do not finally have the ability to get rid of all the weeds and that sometimes attempts to pluck up weeds causes more harm than good. This is the way it is.”^[2]

The parable of the wheat and the weeds, or the wheat and the “tares,” as it is more traditionally known in the King James Version of the Bible, is one of my favorites because it reminds me of two things: first, and more personally, it tells me in the kingdom of God, in God’s garden, I don’t have to be perfect to be a member of the kingdom. God says I can stay, even if some days, I act more weed-like than wheat-like.

Second, and more globally, weeds, the bad stuff, are part of the greater scheme of life. No matter the purity and beauty of any garden, or any situation, there is always the likelihood of some less than perfect plant or process showing up to remind us that good and bad co-exist in the garden of life. That is a fact of life.

In the first telling of the parable, in verses 24 through 30, Jesus “seems to challenge those who build boundaries and want a ‘pure’ community. Surely this would refer [in Jesus’ day] to the Pharisees and other religious leaders who continually question Jesus’ choices of friends and dinner companions. Also, [we would expect,] Jesus is addressing those within his band of followers who may be questioning the presence of certain others. It is no surprise, then, that Matthew would take this parable and adapt it to apply to the church, especially his own church which was concerned with issues of inclusiveness.”^[3]

So maybe the question which the parable poses for us in the 21st century is not the question of the slaves to their master, “Where did these weeds come from?” (Matthew 13:27), but rather, “Are you wheat waving in the sun or are you a weed shooting out from under a rock?” And then, “If you believe you are wheat, what do you ask God to do about the weeds all around you? Should God pull them out, or should you try to learn something from them? And if you are weeds, how do you ask God to redeem you and convince you there is a purpose for your being?”

We are in the midst of a time when weeds of a death dealing virus, destruction of our institutions, and discrimination against our black brothers and sisters seem to be choking out the wheat of our lives. And yet, the wheat will not be choked out entirely. It survives and thrives in the lives and dedication of those working on the front lines of science, medicine, education and government.

These are the ones trying to save us from the life taking virus that continues to suck the life out of us.

These are the ones trying to execute the duties of their offices of governing us that we might rise once again from the ravages of this virus, racial discrimination and the actions of other self serving individuals.

These are the ones brave enough and devoted enough, whether black or white, who give their lives that we might live together peaceably as brothers and sisters in the kingdom of God, sharing the grand pie of life with one another, not hoarding it from one another.

“Where did these weeds come from?” They came from us, and we can learn from them, and then we can pull them out to make more room for the wheat of us, if only we have the will to do so.

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 condition of racism.... and 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.....

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 niece Pam, and Jackie’s 92 year old friend Genevieve Micali, Michael and Gail in southern Maine.... *Please send me the names of those you would like for me to add to this list next Sunday!*

A Benediction

Go into this day with peace and love in your hearts.

May God bless you and keep you.

May God’s face radiate upon you and flood you with grace and tender mercies.

May God smile upon you always and cover your life with peace.

Amen.

Readings from the RCL (Revised Common Lectionary)

for Sunday, July 26, 2020

Genesis 29:15-28; Psalm 105:1-11, 45b;
Romans 8:26-39; Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

Words to ponder today

*“Faith is being so sure of what the spirit has whispered in your heart
that your belief in its eventuality is unshakable.”*

*“Every generation leaves behind a legacy.
What that legacy will be is determined by the people of that generation.
What legacy do you want to leave behind?”*

~ Congressman John Lewis (1940-2020),
from his book *Across that Bridge, A Vision for Change and the Future of
America*

^[1]*The New Interpreter's Study Bible*, Vol VIII, 1995, p. 311.

^[2]*Ibid.*

^[3]*Awaken, the Art of Imaginative Preaching*, Pentecost 1 2008, Year A, for Sunday, July 20, 2008, p. 42.