

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

Last Sunday morning I wrote that we were in “the dog days of summer.” This morning we are in the cool, cloudy days of the last month of summer.... It’s been a hard week of difficult news – more deaths from this deadly virus, political rankling ratcheting up, and continuing uncertainty about too many aspects of our daily lives.... I don’t know about you, but I don’t like uncertainty. I like to know where I’m going, how I’m going to get there, and what new and good outcomes will result from the journey from here to there. But, that’s not the journey we’re on at the moment, is it? We’re on a journey with little or no assurance of what is to come in the weeks and months to come. I feel some assurance of better times to come in these words of Maya Angelou that are quoted in this morning’s “Word for the Day” from gratefulness.org: “Continue to be who and how you are, to astonish a mean world with your acts of kindness.” With a persistent attitude of kindness and good will, not rancor and ill will, hopefully, we will come out of this nightmare of uncertainty with some degree of normalcy and stability.... Can we hold this hope together? Our very lives seem now to depend on it.....

One way to help us feel some degree of normalcy and stability, at least for a half hour, will come again next Sunday, August 23rd at 3 p.m. as we come together (safely!) to share in another ice cream sandwich social in Leach Hall, or outside in our parking lot at the church if the weather cooperates and it isn’t too hot. Let me know if you can join us so we’ll be sure to have enough ice cream sandwiches for everyone. I know we all enjoyed our time together, safely in masks and from short distances, in July at our first ice cream gathering!

Reach me at freerangepastor@gmail.com or leave me a text at 207-322-1948 to let me know you can join us on August 23rd!

Blessings to all this cool Sunday morning of the late of Summer..... Susan

p.s. I will download this morning’s scripture reading and sermon to my Facebook page shortly: [freerangepastor](https://www.facebook.com/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, August 16, 2020
as prepared by Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet
Pastor of the Federated Church of Thomaston**

Opening Prayer

How good it is, O Creator of us all,
when your grace finds embodiment in community,
even as we gather this day in cyberspace, not physical space.

How very good it will be when we act
with greater love and experience even deeper unity
than we have yet known.

Lead us this day, O God,
to where, and to whom, you would have us go,
even as we remain apart from one another in physical space.
Help us to remember we are never alone in spirit
with your Spirit to guide us.

Amen.

A reading about persistence.... “Small changes”



Let no one be discouraged
by the belief there is nothing
one man or one woman can do
against the enormous array of the world's ills,
against misery and ignorance,
injustice and violence.
... Few will have the greatness to bend history itself,
but each of us can work to change
a small portion of events,
and in the total of all those acts will be written
the history of our generation.

~ Robert Kennedy

A Reading of Scripture – Matthew 15:21-28

Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, “Have mercy on

me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon.” But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, “Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us.” He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” But she came and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, help me.” He answered, “It is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.” She said, “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.” Then Jesus answered her, “Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.” And her daughter was healed instantly.”

A sermon based on Matthew 15:21-28
“But he did not answer her....”

(putting covering over my head) Oh my! Whew! It was a long walk, but I wanted to come and talk to you.... because I knew you heard about the Canaanite woman and her sick child just now. I wanted to tell you *my* story and how it was with *my* little girl when she was sick so long ago. You didn’t hear about *me* in the story you heard because it wasn’t about me, it was about another mother, and Jesus. There’s lots of us in the subtext, or between the lines, of your Bible verses. We don’t show up in the stories in the Bible you read, but we were there....

I knew of that Canaanite woman and her daughter. They lived in my village in the region of Tyre and Sidon. We were all “outsiders” to the Jews. Some people called us “Gentiles,” which really just meant we weren’t Jews. People didn’t think of *us* as “chosen” in any way. We were “unclean,” they said. We were not part of “the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” (Matt 15:24) We were shunned and hated.

I never understood all of that. I knew we were good people, God-fearing people, just as important to God as anyone else was. But we were beaten down, discriminated against, and made to feel low and dirty and unloved. It was a hard life to bring a baby into.

But I had a little girl. (smile) Oh, she was beautiful – just as beautiful as *any* little Jewish girl was. I loved her so much. She ran and played with all the other children in the village.... And then she got sick. We don’t know what it was. She just wasn’t “right,” and seemed to be “tormented by a demon,” (Matt 15:22) like the little girl whose mother approached Jesus when he came into our village.

I didn't tell anyone then, but I'll tell you – I was there that day when Jesus and some of his disciples “from away” came down the street. I saw that woman with her child in her arms go up *so boldly* to Jesus. I heard her shouting, “Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon.” (Matt 15:22)

I thought, “How can she do that? He's a holy man from *Israel*. He isn't one of *us*. He's a stranger. Who was she to think she, a woman, a Gentile, an outsider, could speak to such a man whom we had heard had done amazing things in Israel.” He seemed bigger than life. I hid behind a tree with *my* daughter in *my* arms, watching.... and listening....

And then the strangest thing happened. “He did not answer her at all.” (Matt 15:23) You could have heard a pin drop in the dirt right there in the street. She shouted out to him and he didn't say anything. He just looked at her. It seemed like he looked right through her. I didn't know whether he was in a trance, or angry or what.... There was just silence all around us.

We had heard of some of the things that happened before he came to our village. “He had just come from Nazareth, his own hometown, where his friends and family doubted his authority and took offense at his teaching. He had recently received word that John the Baptist had lost his head to a dancing girl, and he had tried to withdraw from the crowds for a while, but the crowds followed him, and he took five loaves and two fishes and fed them all. [You heard about that a few weeks ago.] Then there was the story at sea and Peter's wish to cross the water, ruined by Peter's fear and doubt. [I think you heard about that last Sunday.]

Everywhere Jesus turned he found need – need and people who wanted what he could *do for them* but who remained blind to *who he was*. He [had to have been] frayed, at the end of his rope, and all but used up. Then comes the [woman from our village] the Canaanite woman crying out to him to heal her daughter – one more of the needy multitudes who wanted something from him” (BBT, p. 62 in *The Seeds of Heaven*) and she shouted out.

Was he angry at her? Was he angry at all those in his homeland who couldn't seem to understand what he came to offer? Was he just so exhausted he couldn't speak? I don't know.

Then “his disciples came and urged him, saying, ‘Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us.’ He answered, ‘I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.’” (Matt 15:23-24) I couldn't tell whether he was angry in his tone or just feeling defeated by the fact that his own kind didn't understand who he was.

And then the woman with her child came so close to him she could touch his cloak and she “knelt before him, saying, ‘Lord, help me.’ He answered, ‘It is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.’” (Matt 15:25-26) I was stunned beyond anything I had ever known. Was he calling us “*dogs*”? Was he like all the rest of them – spitting on us, self-righteous bastards telling us we were dirty and not worthy of life or any consideration? Was he really like all the rest of them? I couldn’t move. The tears started running down my face. Did this holy man, who had saved so many in Israel, did he really find *us* that *unworthy* of compassion and mercy?

But then, the woman went even further. “She said, ‘Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.’” (Matt 15:27) Good God, what had gotten into her? How could she -- a woman, a Canaanite, a Gentile -- chastise and berate this holy man from Israel?

Again, I couldn’t move. I couldn’t speak. I couldn’t think clearly. I thought, “This must be a dream, but it can’t be, because I’m holding my little daughter in my arms, so sick, and so quiet and so in need of healing – just like the little daughter of this outspoken, brash woman who was no better and no worse than I was.”

“Then Jesus answered her, ‘Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.’ And her daughter was healed instantly.” (Matt 15:28) *Her* daughter was healed. This holy man from Israel listened to this Canaanite woman and her daughter was *healed*.

My God, my God, why didn’t I walk out from behind the tree and go up to Jesus, like that bold woman did with her daughter? Why was I afraid? Why didn’t *I* ask for mercy? Why did I hang back? Why did I not think *I* was worthy, as worthy as she and her sick child were?

Maybe you don’t understand all those questions I asked myself, but I bet you do. People in your world today are in so much need of mercy, of someone who will listen to them, of someone who will admit *they* might be wrong in their opinions and ask for mercy themselves. So many are in need of someone who will cross boundaries of all kinds and consider new ways of looking at things.

Maybe you are the people who *need mercy*.

Maybe you are the ones who will look *others* in the eye and say, “Great is your faith. Let it be done for you as you wish.” (Matt 15:28)

Maybe *you* are the people who understand who Jesus was and why he came.

Maybe we will all live in peace together someday -- showing mercy toward one another and receiving mercy from God.

I must go now.... but I'm glad I came to talk with you. There needs to be more understanding in the world, more compassion, more ears willing to listen, more people motivated by love, not hate, more working together rather than being angry and afraid of one another. It's all hard, but I came to tell you it is possible. My Canaanite sister shows us the way.

May all of you say, "Amen." (head down and head covering dropping)

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 Jackie's 92 year old friend Genevieve Micali, Michael and Gail in southern Maine, Pricilla O'Hara on the death of her husband Wally.... *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, August 23, 2020

Exodus 1:8-2:10; Psalm 124; Romans 12:1-8; Matthew 16:13-20

Words to ponder today about persistence.....

“Energy and persistence conquer all things.” ~ Benjamin Franklin

“permanence, perseverance and persistence in spite of all obstacles, discouragements, and impossibilities: it is this, that in all things distinguishes the strong soul from the weak.”

~ Thomas Carlyle

“You just can’t beat the person who never gives up.” ~ Babe Ruth

“In the confrontation between the stream and the rock, the stream always wins – not through strength, but through persistence.” ~ Buddha

“Never give up. Never give in. Never become hostile.... Hate is too big a burden to bear.”

~ Representative John Lewis