

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

Words matter. Words work for good or for ill. Words cause us to rise to an occasion or shrink away from it. Words make us laugh or they infuriate us. In my “Summer meditation” on Friday morning, I quoted Abraham Lincoln as saying, “You can fool some of the people all of the time, and all of the people some of the time, but you cannot fool all of the people all of the time.” The trouble is.... he may not have said these words. On the same day as I included this quote in my meditation, Bill Moyers wrote a piece entitled, “A Cautionary Tale About Getting Your History Lessons from Internet Memes.” When I looked up the quote about fooling people and whether Lincoln actually said it or not, it appears he may not have said it! In fact, it may not have been said, until long after Lincoln’s death, in the late 19th century by the founder of the Barnum & Baily Circus, P. T. Barnum!

But the bottom line is this – words matter, no matter to whom we attribute their creation. Sometimes we place greater meaning on words we believe are spoken by some noted person, i.e., Lincoln, George Washington, Martin Luther King, John F. Kennedy, the apostle Paul.... or Jesus.... We can work hard to document who said what in our recollections of the past hundred years or so. But further back than that, we cannot document the actual authors of noted words by historical leaders or religious figures, no matter their stature in our minds or hearts.

But words matter. Some words matter more than others. Their authorship is not as important as their meaning. What do we learn from them? How do they affect our personal and communal lives? How do we use them and pass them on to others? In these coming months, many words are going to be spoken that half of us will take to be true, while the other half of us will say they are not true. It is not *who* says what words, but why and how words used for good or for ill, that matters. We have choices to make.

I invite all of us to remember these words *attributed* to the apostle of Paul as he spoke to the followers of Jesus in Rome in the latter part of the first century: “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, **so far as it depends on you**, live peaceably with all.” (Romans 12:14-18)

Blessings to all this cool Sunday morning of late 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, August 30, 2020
as prepared by Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet
Pastor of the Federated Church of Thomaston**

A Call to Worship

We come together on the edge of possibilities.
For in this time, among this community of faith
we encounter the Sacred Spirit
who awakens, stirs, convicts, comforts, renews, and transforms.
We come, we gather in cyberspace again,
yet we are open, we wait, as one body.
Let us worship God together.

A Prayer of Confession & Words of Assurance *

Faithful God, you remember us, but sometimes we forget you.
Generous God, you give us gifts, but sometimes we don't even notice them.
Sometimes we even leave them unwrapped and never discover what you've given us.
Righteous God, you offer us your law and commandments
so that we might live faithful and joyful lives,
but sometimes we forget your teaching, or we don't pay attention,
or do our homework.
Ever-present God, you stand ready to hear our cries of sorrow and grief,
but sometimes we cannot even tell you the pain on our hearts,
and so we carry our heavy burdens alone.
Covenant God, you call us into everlasting relationship with you,

but sometimes we just cannot understand what that means.
You give us everything and we want more.
You offer us eternity and we want longer.
We find ourselves bargaining with you,
because we don't understand how to accept such amazing generosity.
Forgive us, gracious and loving God.
Open our hearts and minds and souls to comprehend your goodness,
to remember your amazing acts of liberation,
and to trust in the future to which you call us.
We pray to you, O God, and ask for forgiveness
for our blindness and self-centeredness.
We will do our best, from this day forward,
to hear, accept, remember, and trust in the good news
of your amazing gift of mercy and forgiveness and love for each of us.
Amen.

* From *Seasons of the Spirit* for Sunday, October 6, 2013

A Reading of Scripture – Romans 12:1-21

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect.

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

Romans 12:1-8

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, **so far as it depends on you**, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." No, "if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

12:9-21

Romans

A sermon based on Romans 12:1-21
"....so far as it depends on you...."

Pray with me. Generous, forgiving God, remind us what love is all about. Teach us not to judge, but to leave that work to you. Show us what you would have us do, so far as it depends on us, to live peaceably with all this day. Amen.

This isn't the sermon I was planning to deliver this morning based on the Exodus and Matthew texts assigned for today from the Revised Common Lectionary. Instead, I'm working from the texts from last Sunday and today from Paul's letter to the believers in Rome that I just read to you. This sermon comes as a letter I mysteriously received from the man Paul himself as he dictated it to me. I believe Paul feels that in the midst of the rancorous political atmosphere we are caught in at the moment, these reflections from his letter to the people of Rome might be helpful. So here is what Paul dictated to me....

Good morning! "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. To all God's beloved [in Thomaston, Maine] who are called to be saints," (Rom 1:7 adapted) I come to you as Paul, "a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which God promised beforehand through this prophet in the holy scriptures, the gospel concerning God's Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received

grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for the sake of his name, including yourselves who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.” (Rom 1:1-7) I do tend to get a bit wordy at times, but we tended to do that in my day two thousand years ago, just as you sometimes do in your day!

I know you expected a regular, ordinary sermon from your pastor this morning, but I have felt for some time that you need a little extra spiritual fix – seeing as how you and the other Gentiles and people of many various religious stripes in your day seem to have gotten off track concerning the message of our brother Jesus who was, is and always will be available to us as our redeemer, through our sustainer, the Holy Spirit. So, I have come today – to preach the message I gave to the people of Rome in Chapter 12, verses 1-21, your assigned lectionary text for last Sunday and today.

I know those words might seem foreign to you with your modern ways and your twenty-first century ideas, but what I have to say to you crosses all boundaries of time. My message is for you, just as it was for the first hearers of Jesus’ words and deeds, and the first believers in him as their Christ, their Savior in all times of trial and triumph. So hear this and keep in mind I speak with only the best intentions and love for you and for your kind.

I have worried that Jesus’ message has somehow become hijacked over the centuries by those who would claim to be holier than you, more “correct” in their interpretations of the ancient scriptures than any others, supposed keepers of the truth of Jesus’ words and actions in ways that do not meet the criteria of his true teachings or his life as they actually happened and as, I believe, he would have wished for all of you.

“I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.” (Rom 12:1) By this I do not mean that you should *give up* something for God. Not at all! I do not mean that you should take dead animals and offer them to God. That was the old way, before Jesus. I mean you should give your all – in body, mind and spirit – to God in your thinking, in your praying, in your doing for others. In all of this there is worship and the giving and sharing of life with those who are so in need of new hope and new direction in the midst of the hard times you are facing now, especially now when you are dealing with a pandemic that is taking too many lives and political wrangling that is taking too much negative energy.

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect.” (Rom 12:2) By this I do not mean you have to give up your cell phones and your laptops and your modern conveniences of all kinds. I do not mean you should *stop thinking* and only sit in prayerful silence in your temple. I mean you should *think hard* about your actions and your words – do they do justice – for those most in need of mercy and guidance? Do they show kindness to others – no matter who they are, no matter what their political party is, or what religious professions they make? Do they demonstrate that you walk humbly with God as the prophet Micah proclaimed and called for long before even *I* was born? (Micah 6:8)

Be transformed, brothers and sisters. Shake off the mass advertising and sensational rubbish that comes at you from all directions so that you lose sight of the purpose of your very being. Your purpose, sisters and brothers, is to do all within your power to understand, to think about, to live out the will of God.

And what is the will of God? I believe your pastor wrote about this in one of her Summer meditations last week. “To love God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself” (Luke 10:27) proclaims the will of God. As your Nike slogan says, “Just do it!” and you will have done much to transform not only your own lives, but the lives of those around you, and the lives of those whom you’ll never meet, but whom God calls you to love, no matter what.

“For by the grace given to me, Paul, I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.” (Rom 12:3) I speak from personal experience, brothers and sisters, for I was one to think of myself more highly than I should have thought. I was an arrogant persecutor of Jesus’ first followers. I was a Roman Jew who set out to kill these followers of Jesus. I thought I was “hot stuff” and proud of it. But I was wrong. I changed my mind when I receive a vision of the Lord Jesus, and heard his voice loud and clear as he said to me, “Saul, Saul (that was my Hebrew name then), why do you persecute me?” (Acts 9:4)

I saw the light, as it were, and came to understand that Jesus did not come to do away with our strict Jewish law but to fulfill it in new and more compassionate ways. *My mind was changed, sisters and brothers.* My pride in myself and my determination to kill those who did not agree with me were proven to be less

important forces in my life than my new found love and thirst for trying to understand what Jesus came to do. You can do this, too. Turn around. Think with sober judgment, not with self-serving arrogance. Use your heads *and* your hearts to determine how you can best serve God in the days and months and years to come.

“For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.” (Rom 12:5-8)

Let’s face it, brothers and sisters, we’re all in this life together, whether we like it that way or not. No one of us is more important or better or more deserving than the other. Each one of us has gifts and talents God has given to us to be shared with others. We might be called to preach, or teach, or serve or do all of these in our chosen fields of endeavor. And we are called to do these things with good humor and a cooperative spirit.

I don’t understand why the people of your day cannot seem to understand this. Yet, I know it was no different in my day. There was fighting and squabbling in the first Christian churches. There were those who thought they were better Christians than all others. There was back-stabbing and meanspirited talk.

As I’ve grown much older now, I have come to believe perhaps it is all part of the human condition that in the end will serve a good purpose, God’s purpose. Perhaps without the bad behavior raging all around us, we wouldn’t know good behavior and be called to strive for it. Perhaps without turning away from God and turning inward to our own little issues, we wouldn’t know the delight of turning toward God and turning outward to be at one, in one body, of compassionate souls all doing our best to try to understand and live out God’s will for each one of us.

Brothers and sisters, “let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affections, outdo one another in showing honor.... If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” (Romans 12:9-10, 18, 21)

I’ll leave you with two questions today: What are you willing to risk to cross physical, mental and spiritual boundaries to meet others whom you believe

are not like you at all? What walls of political, economic and social isolation are you willing to tear down for the sake of God's will in the world?

Well, brothers and sisters, I've come to the end of what I want to say to you today. "Now to God who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but is now disclosed, and through the prophetic writings is made known to all the Gentiles," (Romans 16:25-26) go into your day, be well and do good "so far as it depends on you. Live peaceably with all." (Romans 12:18)

Let the people say, "Amen."

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

Please hold in your prayers the people of Louisiana after the deadly hurricane that traveled through their state this past week.....

And 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 which continues to take the lives of too many of our Black brothers and sisters
....

And all those families affected by the use of addictive drugs among their members....

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 AND those you would like for me to remove from this list!*

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, September 6, 2020**

Exodus 12:1-14; Psalm 149; Romans 13:8-14; Matthew 18:15-20

Words to ponder today about “words”.....

“Words are, of course, the most powerful drug used by mankind.” ~ Rudyard Kipling

“I like good strong words that mean something.” ~ Louisa May Alcott

“Words mean more than what is set down on paper. It takes the human voice to infuse them with shades of deeper meaning.” ~ Maya Angelou

“I know nothing in the world that has as much power as a word. Sometimes I write one, and I look at it, until it begins to shine.” ~ Emily Dickinson

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

~ John 1:1