

Good chilly morning from a hill in Rockport....

I'm thinking about paradox this morning.... The "Sight Psalm for September 11, 2021" from the Upper Room showed up in my "in box" yesterday morning on my iPhone. It was about paradox. It goes, "Beauty and pain, joy and sorrow, death and new life, contradictions coexist in the world God has created." Do you find that you forget about the paradoxes of life when things are going awry? I do. I need to be reminded of the push *and* pull, the right *and* wrong, the truth *and* falsehood of too much nowadays. I get myself all stewed up about the pull, the wrong, the falsehood of so much that happens and forget about the push, the right, the truth that are always there, if only I could remind myself of them. Much of the commentary yesterday around the 20th anniversary of "9/11" was about the bravery, the goodness, the compassion of those involved in that awful day, even in the midst of the hard memories of the pull, the wrong, the falsehood of that day twenty years ago. Perhaps it is only in the most horrible situations of pain, sorrow, and death that we come face to face with beauty, joy, and new life.... if only we could open our eyes to see both with more clarity and greater wisdom. In my sermon below I reflect from the Book of Proverbs' understanding of the Wisdom of God crying out in the street and the more modern proverb of "what goes around comes around." Perhaps it is where we place the weight on either side of the paradoxes of life that matters. Perhaps our challenge is to always focus on the push, the right, the truth sides of paradox rather than becoming stifled by the pull, the wrong, the falsehood sides of the paradoxes we simply cannot avoid in this life. What do you think?

Blessings to each one this early morn..... I hope many of you reading these words can join me in church this morning, or hear the sermon when I send it out on line later today.... Focus on beauty, joy and new life this day, as best you can..... Susan

"Wisdom cries out in the street..."
A Sermon for the Federated Church of Thomaston
Thomaston, Maine
Sunday, September 12, 2021
Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet
Scripture: Proverbs 1:20-33

Wisdom cries out in the street; in the squares she raises her voice.
At the busiest corner she cries out; at the entrance of the city gates she speaks;
"How long, O simple ones, will you love being simple?
How long will scoffers delight in their scoffing and fools hate knowledge?
Give heed to my reproof; I will pour out my thoughts to you;
I will make my words known to you.

Because I have called you and you refused,
have stretched out my hand and no one heeded,
and because you have ignored all my counsel and would have none of my
reproof,
I also will laugh at your calamity;
I will mock when panic strikes you,
when panic strikes you like a storm,
and your calamity comes like a whirlwind,
when distress and anguish come upon you.
Then they will call upon me, but I will not answer;
they will seek me diligently, but will not find me.
Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord,
would have none of my counsel, and despised all my reproof,
therefore they shall eat the fruit of their way and be sated with their own devices.
For waywardness kills the simple,
and the complacency of fools destroys them;
but those who listen to me will be secure and will live at ease, without dread of
disaster.”
Proverbs 1:20-33

Will you pray with me. Teaching, wisdom-giving God, help us to listen up and be better students of your word! Remind us that while your grace is free, your command for our attention calls us to take heed of your instruction. You cry out in the street and we too often look the other way. Help us to turn our eyes back to you, O God, for in *you* our way forward is secure. In *you* our days are numbered in good fashion. Amen.

“What goes around comes around.” I believe that common, modern day proverb. Some of you have heard me say those words – most often when something unfortunate has happened – when someone has done something not nice, or has said something mean or hateful, or has shown unkindness towards another. Put another way, “you reap what you sow.”

And still another way to say this is to believe we “come full circle” or in the Buddhist tradition it’s “good karma” or “bad karma.” Regardless of the way we phrase it – actions have consequences – they can be good and life giving, or they can be bad and destructive. Most often, it seems to me, we have the power to choose which it will be.

...except for September 11th, 2001. Yesterday was the 20th anniversary of the horrific tragedy, the unprecedented terrorist attack, of what has become known simply as “9/11.” “Where were you when 9/11 happened?” we have often asked

one another over these twenty years. We have asked that of one another in the same way we have asked, “Where were you when you heard Kennedy was shot? Where were you when you heard the United States had entered WW II? In all of these challenging times, we remember, and wonder how they could have happened. And I try to hold onto the opening verse of our text for this morning from Proverbs, “Wisdom cries out in the streets...” (Proverbs 1:20) and the more recent proverb of sorts, “What goes around comes around.”

The writer of Proverbs believes that, too. It’s stated most eloquently in the final two verses of our passage for today: “For waywardness kills the simple, and the complacency of fools destroys them; but those who listen to me will be secure and will live at ease, without dread of disaster.” (Prov 1:32-33) What goes around does, indeed, come around, according to the writer of Proverbs. Actions, and inactions, have consequences.

“Listen up, or you’re going to be sorry!”, a parent might say! Or, “Life lesson!” Yes, “what goes around comes around – life lesson – listen up!”

But, we forget, don’t we? I know I do. I’m reminded of that when I take in the words of our Responsive Reading for today.^[1] It begins, “May the gifting God bless me with renewing faith in the unfolding of a leaf, flourishing hope in the new dawn, loving words in the mouth of a companion.” And I remind myself of all the times I ignore the glory of God’s creation all around me, when I get bogged down in the hopelessness of the daily news, and take for granted the loving words of a companion.

“May the gifting God bless me with the courage to rest when I am tired, the strength to receive when I am needy, the patience to pause when I am rushed.” And I remind myself of all the times in my life when I’ve pushed beyond exhaustion thinking I didn’t need to rest and then came down with a very sick three-day headache. I think of the times when I could have said, “I need some help here,” yet resisted because I wanted to “do it myself,” whatever the task was. And I think of my annoyance when something doesn’t work right, or *I* don’t work right, and I rush through the problem only to make matters worse – Nance can attest to my impatience and my less than holy words on those occasions – when stopping, and taking a deep breath, and thinking p-a-t-i-e-n-c-e would take me much farther than my haste ever will. Push to exhaustion, let impatience have its way... and what goes around will come around.

And finally, I receive the truth of the final words of our Responsive Reading: “May the gifting God bless me with not only the message to speak, but

also the message to hear, not only the wisdom to offer, but also the wisdom to embrace, not only compassion for others, but also compassion for self.” I’m a minister, for God’s sake! For GOD’S sake, I am a minister and that means I need to model for others what I would hope they would do for themselves and others with God’s help – to *listen* for God’s word more and open *my mouth* less, to *receive* the wisdom of God through other’s voices rather than too eagerly being willing to express *my take* on God’s wisdom, to *accept* the compassion others offer to me instead of always thinking *I’M the one* to be doing the compassion thing.

This faith stuff is very humbling, don’t you think? God calls us to listen, to take heed, to stop and think before we act or speak, or rant or rave, to accept help and compassion from others, to be easier on ourselves rather than harsher than anyone else could ever be.

The thing is -- if we can bring ourselves to do all of that, WE are not in charge, God is. And perhaps that is the underlying message of the Book of Proverbs – God is in charge and we are not. God’s wisdom is what counts, not ours. What goes around comes around. If we go through life thinking we know everything, in the long, or the short, run we’re going to discover, if we’re paying attention even slightly, that most days we know little or nothing at all – about what really counts, about the wisdom of God.

Eugene Peterson’s Introduction to the Book of Proverbs from his interpretation of the Bible, *The Message*, seems particularly apropos as we remember the anniversary of 9/11 yesterday and all who were lost that day. Peterson writes:

“Many people think that what’s written in the Bible has mostly to do with getting people into heaven – getting right with God, saving their eternal souls. It does have to do with that, of course, but not *mostly*. It is equally concerned with living on this earth – living well, living in ROBUST SANITY (my emphasis). In our Scriptures, heaven is not the primary concern, to which earth is a tag-along afterthought. “On earth *as* it is in heaven” is Jesus’ prayer.

‘Wisdom’ is the biblical term for this on-earth-as-it-is-in-heaven everyday living. Wisdom is the art of LIVING SKILLFULLY (my emphasis) in whatever actual conditions we find ourselves. It has virtually nothing to do with information as such, with knowledge as such. A college degree is no certification of wisdom – nor is it primarily concerned with keeping us out of moral mud puddles, although it does have a profound moral effect upon us.

Wisdom has to do with becoming skillful in honoring our parents and raising our children, handling our money and conducting our sexual lives, going to work and exercising leadership, using words well and treating friends kindly, eating and drinking healthily, cultivating emotions within ourselves and attitudes toward others that make for peace. Threaded through all these items is the insistence that the way we think of and respond to God is the most practical thing we do. In matters of everyday practicality, nothing, absolutely nothing, takes precedence over God.

[Peterson ends his introduction this way,] Proverbs concentrates on these concerns more than any other book in the Bible. Attention to the here and now is everywhere present in the stories and legislation, the prayers and the sermons, that are spread over the thousands of pages of the Bible. Proverbs distills it all into riveting images and aphorisms that keep us connected in holy obedience to the ordinary.”^[2]

In the “here and now” we are in one of the most challenging times in our country’s history. Divisiveness, prejudice, ignorance and outright hatred spill into our news feeds each day. What happened to the national experience of mourning, the national sense of community we experienced after the tragic and horrific events of September 11, 2001? Where have we gone awry?

“Wisdom cries out in the street...” the author of Proverbs proclaims. What goes around comes around. On this weekend of the 20th anniversary of one of the darkest days of our country’s history, are we listening?

Let the people say, “Amen.”

Federated Church in Thomaston
United Church of Christ United Methodist Church
All Are Welcome
Sunday, September 12, 2021

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

Lector: Gerry Zwick

Guest Organist: BJ Marsh

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 “Nimrod” Edward Elgar (arr. by Jim Paterson)

Call to Worship

Leader: Our wandering God calls us to unlock our minds and release our imaginations to see wisdom all around us.

People: Our mysterious God, who is beyond explanation, calls us to step away from well-worn answers and personal opinions.

All: Our all encompassing God calls us to be open to new wisdom coming from unexpected voices everywhere. Let us worship God!

***Opening Hymn** “Be Thou My Vision” 451 blue hymnal

An Invocation....

A Reading “the gifting God” (see insert)

A Moment of Silence

SERVICE OF THE WORD

Scripture Reading Proverbs 1:20-33

***Gloria Patri**

Message “Wisdom cries out in the street....” Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet

***Hymn of Meditation** “Precious Lord, Take My Hand” 474 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 “Holy Spirit, Faithful Guide” Herbert Hughes (Based on tune by Marcus Wells)

***Doxology No. 95 Blue**

***Prayer of Dedication**

***Closing Hymn** “Jesus Calls Us O’er the Tumult” 398 blue hymnal

Benediction

Postlude “Jubilation” James Denton

Revised Common Lectionary Readings for Sunday, September 19, 2021
Proverbs 31:10-31; Psalm 11; James 3:13-4:3, 7-8a; Mark 9:30-37

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 Whirly, a friend of Margie’s, dealing with cancer challenges, and, from Blair, prayers for her friend Judith on the passing of her daughter, Lani, 42, from brain cancer, from Jackie a request for prayers for Kyle Cloudier, **and** continued deep prayers for Hank and Lucy as Hank endures his cancer journey with the help of Hospice, **and** 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;** Enid, Ann Foster, Carol Moss, Fred Bagnall, Harriet Williams, Julie Pollitt, Zeke Bryant, Sally Harjula Elliot, Helmut Steger, John Flaherty, Doug and BJ Thomson, Heather Van Buskirk, **Tiffany, Lucy’s granddaughter**

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

Wednesday-9/15/21.....7:00
pm: Council Meeting Thursday-9/16/21.....12:00 pm:
Women's Group-bring your lunch Sunday-

9/19/21.....9:30 am: Worship
Service
Suggested Food Pantry Donation..... Canned
Vegetables

The flowers this week are given by Arlene and Chandler Woodmen in loving memory of their sisters, brothers and parents who are no longer with them.

Reminders for next Sunday,
9/19/21

Greeter/Usher: Kay
Sylvester

Lector:

Flowers: Frances
Hernandez
Host: Kathleen Anderson

Coffee

Collection Total for Sunday, September 5, 2021:

Pledges -	\$1373.00
Loose -	\$ 72.00
Rental -	\$ 160.00 WW of ME
Investment Income - Putnam	\$ 4.68
Deacon's Sunday -	\$ 26.46
Total -	\$1636.14

The 2021 weekly budgeted operating cost for the Church and parsonage is \$1623.00 per week.

Thomaston

Federated Church of

**United Church of Christ
&
United Methodist Church
Together Since 1929**

Sunday, September 12, 2021

In the quiet of the morning and led by God's Spirit,
we yearn for healing, we wait for God's saving Presence...

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

FCT email is thomfedchurch@gmail.com

WiFi password is #1Church

^[1]Prayer of Rev. Andrea La Sonde Anastos, appears in *Awaken, The Art of Imaginative Preaching*

^[2]Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message, The Bible in Contemporary Language*, Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2002, p. 1093.