

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

Happy Grandparents Day! I wouldn't have known today was Grandparents Day until I read my daily feed from *The Old Farmer's Almanac, The Sunday Edition* this morning! "In 1970, Marian McQuade, a member of the West Virginia Commission on Aging, began a campaign to recognize the (often) wisest and most beloved of all family members: the grandparent. Success would arrive in a relatively short 8 years, when in 1978 President Jimmy Carter declared the first Sunday after Labor Day to be National Grandparents Day." (from the *Almanac* for today) Who knew? I didn't. In the midst of all that troubles us in these hard days, I am happy to think about grandparents today!

I never knew any of my grandparents. They all died before they reached their 60's, long before I was born. Three died of natural causes. The fourth, my grandfather on my father's side, died when he was shot by old "Peachy Green," a moonshiner who lived in the hills around Elkins, West Virginia. My grandfather had been deputized to go out and bring ole "Peachy" in for justice. She apparently said (as the newspaper story revealed), "Come a step closer, and I'll shoot!" And my grandfather did, and died. That's the memory I have of my grandfather, Tom Daniels. What memories do you have of your grandparents? What did they teach you? If you are a grandparent, what will your grandchildren remember that you taught them?

I have a healthy envy for grandparents and grandchildren and the relationships they have. Because I never had the privilege of that relationship, I relish observing it in others. Perhaps more than any time in our lives, we need those strong bonds of family, whether they be of blood relation or not, right now. Happy Grandparents Day, all of you who read my words and know the joy and challenge and love of grandchildren!

As I noted in several of my meditations this week, we will attempt to have church IN PERSON beginning on Sunday, September 27th at 9:30 in Leach Hall in our church.

We will follow all the appropriate protocols to keep us safe and healthy – wearing masks, using hand sanitizer, sitting well spaced apart, NOT singing, but HUMMING, no coffee hour, no paper bulletins and only meeting for 30 to 40 minutes.

All of this will be based on the situation with the virus in Maine as it presents itself towards the end of September. I know we all want to be back together in church on

Sunday mornings. *We must do this safely and wisely as we go forward!*

Blessings to all this cool second Sunday of September, Grandparents' Day..... 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, September 13, 2020
as prepared by Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet
Pastor of the Federated Church of Thomaston**

A Call to Worship

In the rustling of leaves on trees this September morn....
in the gentle breeze behind that rustling....
in the intake of each breath we take....
may we sense the Spirit of God all around us.
Bring us to new awareness of your Spirit,
even as we worship in cyberspace,
not physical space this day....
Amen.

A Prayer of Confession & Words of Affirmation*

Strong, load-bearing God,
we are awakening, slowly but surely, to the burden of a world out of kilter.
In our eagerness for land, for houses, for furniture, for the fire's warmth,
we have denuded the forests.
Healing, cleansing God,
we have left open wounds of broken relationships;
we have destroyed habitats of birds and animals,

and torn communities apart by disagreements
of how to use and preserve the forests of Earth.

Mysterious, mourning God,
we break your heart with our determination to ignore
the wisdom of people through the ages;
wreaking havoc for generation to generation,
we denude the forests and ravage landscapes....

May we be alert to the beauty and infinite wonder
of new possibilities, and alert to the myriad of ways
in which you, in love, are waiting to be discovered
in the all too familiar and yet not known world around us....

God loves the world, and in great unfathomable mystery
we are charged with its care.

As each one of us is intricately woven and intimately known,
so too are the forests and trees – precious as the “lungs” of the world.

As we are aware of this great love and trust,
we are attuned to the wind of God in whom we live
and move and have our being.

**from Seasons of the Spirit for Sunday, September 7, 2014*

A Reading of Scripture – Exodus 14:19-31

And the Angel of God, who went before the camp of Israel, moved and went behind them, and the pillar of cloud went from before them and stood behind them. So it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel. Thus it was a cloud and darkness to the one, and it gave light by night to the other, so that the one did not come near the other all that night.

Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the Lord caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea into dry land, and the waters were divided. So the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea on the dry ground, and the waters were a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. And the Egyptians pursued and went after them into the midst of the sea, all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen.

Now it came to pass, in the morning watch, that the Lord looked down upon the army of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and cloud, and He troubled the army of the Egyptians. And He took off their chariot wheels, so that they drove them with difficulty, and the Egyptians said, “Let us flee from the face of Israel, for the Lord fights for them against the Egyptians.”

Then the Lord said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand over the sea, that the waters may come back upon the Egyptians, on their chariots, and on their horsemen.” And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and when the morning appeared, the sea returned

to its full depth, while the Egyptians were fleeing into it. So the Lord overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea. Then the waters returned and covered the chariots, the horsemen, and all the army of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them. Not so much as one of them remained. But the children of Israel had walked on dry land in the midst of the sea, and the waters were a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.

So the Lord delivered Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. Thus Israel saw the great work which the Lord had done in Egypt; so the people feared the Lord, and believed the Lord and His servant Moses.

A sermon based on Exodus 14:19-31
“...and the waters were divided.”

Pray with me. O God of miraculous clouds and divided waters, may we endeavor to faithfully reflect upon your power in the coming moments and receive the wonder of your deliverance through the holy word of scripture. Amen.

As much as I try to get the image of Charlton Heston as Moses out of my head when I think of this text from Exodus, I haven't been able to do it. The picture of him waving his hand and the waters dividing in the movie “The Ten Commandments” left an indelible mark in my little head when I first saw it. That's pretty amazing considering I had no Sunday School background as a child and really had NO idea what this movie was about! Perhaps that adds fuel to the continual debate over movies and tv and video games and their impact on young minds.

I've tried to stop feeling guilty or silly for being unable to get the image of Charlton Heston as Moses out of my head. And I might just as well let the image stay where it is. For otherwise, the story of the deliverance of the Israelites out of the hands of the Egyptians, as it is told in our scripture passage this morning, becomes too big and too unbelievable to grasp at all.

Deliverance is what the Bible is all about....

Deliverance is why we want to get back to church to worship together in person, so we can feel the physical presence of deliverance in one another.

Deliverance is the discovery that God is alive – here and now – and is waiting for us to show up by the shore of the parting waters.

Deliverance means being freed or liberated from a

constraint.

Deliverance means turning away from sin and turning towards God.

Deliverance means being “rescued in the nick of time” as the Israelites were.

And yet, what of the doubters? What of those Israelites who saw “the waters forming a wall on the right and on the left” (Exodus 14:22) and said, “What?! We’re not going to step into that! We’re going to drown if we do that!” Perhaps it is my own fear of water and being caught without a life jacket that brings this thought to mind, but it DOES point out the risk which the willing Israelites took when they “went into the sea on dry ground.” (Exodus 14:22)

It does point out that THEY had to DO SOMETHING in order to be delivered from the Egyptians and saved by God that day. They had to *participate* in the saving act. More specifically, they had to be *willing* to be saved. And, in the action just prior to our scripture reading for this morning, the Israelites said to Moses in their fear, wandering around in the wilderness, “What have you done to us, bringing us out of Egypt? Is this not the very thing we told you in Egypt, ‘Let us alone and let us serve the Egyptians.’ For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.” (Exodus 14:11-12)

To be WILLING to be saved presents a whole different slant on this story. From the beginning of the biblical narrative in Genesis, God time and time again WANTS to be in a covenantal relationship with us humans. But to use current day slang, our sacred relatives “screwed up” early on. Genesis, Chapter 6, Verse 17 begins with God saying, “For my part, I am going to bring a flood of waters on the earth, to destroy from under heaven all flesh in which is the breath of life; everything that is on the earth shall die. But I will establish my covenant with you (this is Noah); and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons’ wives with you. And of every living thing, of all flesh, you shall bring two of every kind into the ark, to keep them alive with you; they shall be male and female...’ Noah did this; he did all that God commanded him.” (Exodus 6:17-22) Noah was the first human in the biblical story of all our lives to be *willing* to be saved.

The Israelites had to be *willing* to be saved in order to find deliverance from the Egyptians with God. We might say, “Who *wouldn’t* be willing to be saved?” But I can honestly say, I wasn’t willing to explore the presence of God in my life until I was 41. I didn’t think I needed all this Bible stuff and church. And

now, even though I've learned and believe that I had God's grace all long whether I knew and accepted it or not, I see that *willingness*, on my part, might have gotten me here sooner rather than later!

But, as the saying goes, "you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink." We might say the same thing of the Israelites. We might say the same thing of anyone who doubts the reality of God and believes what they have is as good or better than taking the risk by stepping into God's divided waters.

Deliverance is good once you realize you need it. It can be a scary journey on the way to that realization. The obstacles may seem just too great to overcome. I think of the obstacles facing all of us today in the 21st century. The violence, the terrorism, the drugs, the pandemic, death dealing fire and storms, the dependencies, the physical and mental distractions and abuses – each of us is affected by these obstacles to deliverance in one way or another at some level. Whether it be in our own family situations, in our church family, in our divided nation, in the midst of the deadliness of our climate change and political environments.... we're in a mess. The waters seem not to have divided and the enemy, the evil that confronts and chases us often is within us in unrelenting ways as well as without us in political and racial strife, in natural disaster and economic meltdown.

Yes, we're in a mess, perhaps as we have never been before. And yet, we just cannot give up hope. We *are* a part of the biblical drama. We are the *inheritors* of Noah's actions. "He did all that God commanded him," says the author of Genesis.

We'd best not pass judgment on one another, as Paul tells the Romans.

We'd best forgive those who trespass against us, as Jesus proclaims "not seven times, butseventy-seven times," as Gospel writer Matthew writes.

We'd best live believing that divided waters bringing God's deliverance are just around the corner in every moment of our lives. But that's a hard belief to sustain, isn't it?

The image of water as a metaphor for God's all encompassing power is a strong and repeating one throughout the Bible. From the great flood in Genesis which Noah survived, to the divided waters which saved the Israelites, to the baptismal water which brings us new life in Christ, water serves up God deliverance and brings us home for all eternity.... if only we can bring ourselves to ask for deliverance from all that troubles us.

“...and the waters were divided for our sacred ancestors fleeing their captors.” Can we follow them into deliverance?

Let the people say, “Amen.”

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

Please hold in your prayers all those affected by the deadly wildfires burning in California, Washington, and Oregon....

And **continue to** hold in your prayers the people of Louisiana after the deadly hurricane that traveled through their state week before last....

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

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 may the Creator of us all, the Sustainer of us all,

and the Holy Spirit surrounding us all,

be with each of you this day and forever.

Amen.

Readings from the RCL (Revised Common Lectionary)

for Sunday, September 20, 2020

Exodus 16:2-15; Psalm 105:1-6, 37-45; Philippians 1:21-30; Matthew 20:1-16

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

“Deliverance: to be brought out of something that is not good to something that is set free.”

~ Anonymous

“The wise man in the storm prays God, not for safety from danger, but for deliverance from fear.” ~ Ralph Waldo Emerson

“Call upon Me in the day of trouble. I will deliver you and you shall glorify Me.”

~ Psalm 50:15

“Deliverance = liberation, salvation, release, rescue, freeing” ~ iPhone Dictionary