

Good early morning from a still dark hill in Rockport....

I'm thinking about foundations this morning, especially in the context of my sermon for later this morning.... A foundation can be "the basis or groundwork of anything; the natural or prepared ground or base on which some structure rests; or the lowest division of a building, wall, or the like, usually of masonry and partly or wholly below the surface of the ground; or a cosmetic, as a cream or liquid, used as a base for facial makeup." (from iPhone Dictionary)

What is the foundation of your faith? What is the basis, below the surface of your spoken words, for your faith? What underlies what people see of your "faith makeup"? Take some time to think about these questions.... as their answers reflect how you carry on your daily affairs.

Speaking of Jesus.... there's a foundation to his ministry that underlies all his teachings, miracle work, and pastoral care for those around him and for us. That foundation is his use of questions to get people to think, to consider, to affirm what they believe. Jesus asks a lot of questions in his very brief time in ministry, and often lets them just hang in the air, like a cloud high up in the sky, or sometimes fog close to the ground.... fog that suddenly lifts and then we can see clearly what is before us, or not....

And then, there's Pontius Pilate, the governor of the Roman province of Judaea who is best known for being the official who presided over the trial of Jesus and later ordered his crucifixion. He asks of Jesus shortly before his crucifixion, "What is truth?" (John 18:38) Jesus is silent. He doesn't answer the question. It just hangs there, in the air of anticipation of what is to come, in the air of what we believe is truth....

Perhaps what has gone awry in these troubled times is our lack of honest, deep questioning of one another, and of ourselves. We live in a world of "sound bites" now, not questions. We seem to have lost sight of the foundational questions of our faith and our daily living. How can we get back to questioning and leave behind the unfounded certainties that are blocking our view of one another and our compassion for one another?

Blessings to each one this Sunday morn.... Susan

p.s. You'll find a questionnaire at the end of the bulletin in this mailing about our technology usage in church. Please think about your answers to this questionnaire and get back to me with them by next Sunday. We have an opportunity to apply for a grant that would help fund our efforts to improve our use of technology to help us grow in good ways in the future. Thanks for responding to these questions, on paper, or in an e-mail back to me at [freerangepastor@gmail.com](mailto:freerangepastor@gmail.com). I'll also have paper copies of the questionnaire as an insert in the bulletins this morning.

**"What were you arguing about on the way?"**

**A Sermon for the Federated Church in Thomaston**

**Thomaston, Maine**

**Sunday, September 19, 2021**

**Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet**

### Scripture: Mark 9:30-37

They went on from there and passed through Galilee. He [Jesus] did not want anyone to know it, for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, “The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again.” But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him.

Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, “**What were you arguing about on the way?**” But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest. He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, “Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.” Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, “Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.”  
Mark 9:30-37

Will you pray with me. Patient and forgiving God, teach us how to stop arguing with one another and begin *listening to* one another more than *speaking at* one another. Help us to get the message Jesus would have us remember this day. Amen.

To begin.... A review of the three things to always keep in mind in reading any biblical text – context, context, context. If we don’t understand and appreciate the context of the time when the book was written and the time of the particular passage’s details within the biblical book, we can’t truly have an understanding of what was at stake back then, or what meaning the text could hold for us now.

We know what happens when statements are taken out of context. We can make them mean anything we choose to have them mean – depending on our particular religious, or political, or social bias or point of view and desire to sway others to our opinion. Depending on what we believe, we can find support for it somewhere in the Bible.... especially if we take verses out of context and lift them out to prove our point or support our case. That’s called “proof texting,” and it can be done for positive purposes and not-so-positive purposes.

They might be related to social or relational matters, as in the disagreements over the legitimacy of gay marriage.... or religious doctrine, as in legitimacy of ordaining women into ministry.... or political agendas, as in whether government programs are unearned entitlements or examples of the biblical mandate to protect the widows and orphans of the world.

Our text for today from the Gospel of Mark is ripe for contextual interpretation on several levels. It tells us of the second of three times in Mark in which Jesus informs his disciples secretly, meaning not in a public forum and not in a news conference, what is going to happen to him, and it isn’t pretty. The text

says Jesus said to them, “The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again.” But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him. (Mk 9:31-32)

Knowing “the rest of the story,” as we do, because we have familiarity with the saga of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection from all four Gospels, we might wonder, “WHY didn’t these disciples of Jesus ‘get it’? Were they that dense that they couldn’t understand what he was trying to tell them? This wasn’t the first time he made these terrible predictions about himself. And he would make them a third time a little later in the story.”

But context is *so* important to keep in mind – the Gospels weren’t written until towards the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century, *at least* thirty to forty years after Jesus’ death. The letters of Paul were the documents written first in actuality, as theologian Marcus Borg made clear in one of his latest books before he died several years ago, *Evolution of the Word, The New Testament in the Order the Books Were Written*. This is not a new idea. Biblical scholars have known this for a long time. Borg just revealed this information in a new, more accurate, format for the New Testament.

Jesus’ first disciples didn’t have a clue as to what he was talking about because they hadn’t read the Bible! They didn’t have commentaries to help them understand his message to them. They hadn’t gone to seminary, they were fishermen for the most part. This stuff was all new to them!

The Gospel of Mark and the other Gospels are not “eyewitness accounts,” as we often hear in our nightly TV news broadcasts or our “smart phone” news apps. They were *remembrances* of something that happened decades before it was recorded in writing. And yet, too often, people speak of these stories today as if they are news reports of an incident that happened yesterday in Thomaston or Camden!

It just isn’t so! They’re *remembrances*, told to help people understand the radical significance of Jesus – in his humanity and in his divine nature. The radicalness of Jesus’ life and message was important back then, and it’s important now. He was a rebel, a religious apple cart upsetter, and a friend to the outcasts of his day, be they the poor, the disabled, the disadvantaged, the sick, or women, or children.

So Jesus tells his closest colleagues he’s going to be betrayed by those around him, then killed by them, and then he’s going to rise from the dead in spite of them. Would you have believed him? I doubt I would have, but I probably

wouldn't have expressed my disbelief out loud. I probably would have said to one of my fellow disciples, as we left the building, "Can you believe this guy? WHAT is he talking about? Surely one of us isn't going to betray him. He's our leader. AND, we're special too, because we're on the 'inside.' We're his most loyal and devoted followers. In fact, we are very special, because WE know Jesus, and the others don't."

But then Jesus walks into their/our conversation and asks, "What were you discussing/debating/arguing about back there?" "Uh, nothing!" our embarrassed, sheepish silence reveals.

"What were you arguing about on the way?" (Mk 9:33) If there was ever a question that Jesus asks his disciples that crosses contexts – from theirs to ours – it's this one, "What were you arguing about on the way?" In my seventy-three years I don't remember another time when so much arguing and bickering and name calling and disrespectful talk has gone on – in the public square, in social commentary, in the political arena. It is as if any sense of compassion or desire to understand one another or respect for one another as fellow human beings have simply evaporated into thin air. I don't know about you, but it's practically making me physically sick, as well as mentally fed up with the whole affair!

I wonder if Jesus felt the same way. The Gospels tell us that occasionally he expressed anger and frustration with his disciples and the religious officials of the day in his very short time in ministry. But most often, he responded to the smallness, the pettiness, the self importance, the lack of awareness of those around him with simple questions – "What were you arguing about on the way?" (Mk 9:33) from our text for today. "Why do you call me lord?" (Lk 6:46) in the Gospel of Luke. "Can you not stay awake even one hour?" (Matt 26:39) from the Gospel of Mark. "Do you have anything here to eat?" (Lk 24:41) again from the Gospel of Luke.

And when Jesus wasn't asking questions, he was involving the least among them to help him get his message across – the poor, the disabled, the disadvantaged, the sick, the women, or the children. In our passage for today it's a little child who helps Jesus to make his point. "Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, 'Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.'" (Mk 9:36-37)

Can you imagine what the response would be if any politician did that today? It would most likely be immediately criticized by their opponents as being

overly dramatic, taking advantage of children, and staging a situation for political gain – a stunt to get votes, a ploy for attention, a diversion from uncomfortable topics they would rather not discuss.

Thinking of the importance of context again, maybe in this case we're not so different than Jesus' clueless disciples. The next verse in Chapter 9, which we'll hear next Sunday, reveals that the disciples simply changed the subject! Verse thirty-seven ends our text for today with "and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me." Verse thirty-eight begins with "John said to him, 'Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us.'" (Mk 9:38) Changing the subject – now there's a way to divert attention away from one's own failings and naked revealings of self importance!

Jesus' first disciples had a long way to go and a lot to learn before they would even begin to get a clue of his message.... and understand what it meant for them individually and as a band of followers who professed that they would follow him anywhere.

The questions for us are these: Do we get it – Jesus' message? And if we do, can we stop arguing about it and get on with it?

Let the people say, "Amen."

**Federated Church in Thomaston**  
**United Church of Christ    United Methodist Church**  
**All Are Welcome**  
**Sunday, September 19, 2021**

Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet, Pastor    Alice Billheimer, Organist/ Choir Director  
Lector: Julie Brooks  
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** "The Peace Within". David Paxton

**Call to Worship**

Leader: God, your world of mercy, of hope and of peace is present right now, as we gather.

**People: Remind us, encourage us, teach us and be with us as we imagine, explore, and celebrate what it means to be your people in the world.**

**All: Let us worship the God of good will in our midst. Amen.**

**\*Opening Hymn** “For the Healing of the Nations” 428 Blue Hymnal

**An Invocation....**

**A Prayer of the People** (see insert)

A Moment of Silence

### **SERVICE OF THE WORD**

**Scripture Reading** Mark 9:30-37

**\*Gloria Patri**

**Message** “What were you arguing about on the way?” Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet

**\*Hymn of Meditation** “This Is My Song” 437 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** “Jesus, the Very Thought of You” Dorothy Wells (tune St. Agnes)

**\*Doxology No. 95 Blue**

**\*Prayer of Dedication**

**\*Closing Hymn** “O God of Every Nation” 435 Blue Hymnal

**Benediction**

**Postlude** “Cortege” Gordon Young

**Revised Common Lectionary Readings for Sunday, September 26, 2021**

**Esther 7:1-6, 9-10, 9:20-22; Psalm 124; James 5:13-20; Mark 9:38-50**

**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](mailto: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**

Sunday-9/26/21 .....9:30 am: Worship Service .....10:30 am: Council Meeting

Suggested Food Pantry Donation..... Jello

The flowers this week are given by Galo III, Frances, Galo IV and Alexander Hernandez in memory of Galo Hernandez Jr..

Reminders for next Sunday, 9/26/21

Greeter/Usher:

Lector: Sumner Kinney

Flowers: Nance Brown

Collection Total for Sunday, September 12, 2021:

Pledges -	\$715.00
Loose -	\$ 56.00
Total -	\$771.00

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

*“Finish every day and be done with it.*

*You have done what you could; some blunders and absurdities no doubt crept in;*

*forget them as soon as you can.*

*Tomorrow is a new day; you shall begin it serenely and with too high a spirit*

*to be encumbered with your old nonsense.”*

~ Ralph Waldo Emerson, 1803-1882, American essayist & poet

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

***Sunday, September 19, 2021***

*“Christian faith is not holding on to a past that recedes ever farther into the distance,  
but experiencing a living present in which everything is different  
because of what once really happened and continues to happen.”*

~ M. Eugene Boring & Fred B. Craddock, in *The People's New Testament Commentary*

**Technology Questionnaire for the Federated Church of Thomaston**

We have an opportunity to receive a grant to improve technology at our church to help us reach more people with our message. Before we create our application, we want your feedback. Please respond, either on line to me at [freerangepastor@gmail.com](mailto:freerangepastor@gmail.com) or by turning in your paper response to the questionnaire by next Sunday, September 26. ***Thanks for your input!***

~ Do you think we should live stream our sermons online? \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

If so, would you watch it? \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

~ Do you watch the sermons we post to our Facebook page and visit our Facebook page?

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

What kinds of additional content would you like to see there?

~ Do you use the Church website? \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

If so, are there any changes or information that you wish it had?

~ Do you get our e-mails? \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

If so, is there additional information you wish they contained? If so, what information?

~ Are there other aspects of technology you believe we should consider?

~ Are you technically inclined? \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

Would you be willing to help set up equipment if trained and take and send photos to our technology team? \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No