

Good soggy Sunday morning from a hill in  
Rockport!

September 26, 2021

I'm thinking about reflections this morning.... They come in many forms, but I think all from one of two points of view – looking back and pondering what might have been hidden in darkness, but now is seen in the light of day OR a careful, thoughtful consideration about a particular subject. My meditations each week are reflections of what I've been thinking about and wanting to share with my readers. We reflect on the news of the past week and beyond, and try to determine what that news might mean as we go forward. We reflect on the words and actions of others, and even our own words and actions, and try to determine their true source and insight. But there's another type of reflection that is the basis, perhaps, of all our reflections – that's the reflection we see in the mirror when we look at ourselves. Who do we see in that reflection? Do we like what we see? Do we wish we saw something different – physically or otherwise – when we look at our reflection in the morning in the mirror in the bathroom....?

There's a profound statement I try to live up to as best I can. I've mentioned before. It appears on the headstone of a person buried in Mt. Hope Cemetery in Bangor. It reads "Character is what you are in the dark." Its author is Dwight Moody who was an American evangelist and publisher who founded the Moody Church, Northfield School and Mount Herman School in Massachusetts, and the Moody Bible Institute and Moody Publishers. He lived from 1837 to 1899. This type of reflection doesn't require a physical mirror, but a deeper, more intimate, more honest look at who we are when no one else is looking at us.... in the dark of night.

Speaking of today's text for my sermon, Mark 9:38-50, we witness from the distance of two thousand years, a story of a less than stellar reflection of one's self in the person of John, one of Jesus' first disciples. John apparently thought he was a member of the "in crowd" of Jesus, and very special because of his relationship with Jesus. We have to wonder what John thought of himself when he looked in a mirror, if they had mirrors two thousand years ago. What did his reflection reveal of who he was as a person of character? What does your reflection reveal of your character in the dark of night and in the light of day?

Blessings to each one on this rainy, soggy Sunday morning.... I hope some of you will join me in church this morning for worship.... Wear your wellies and your raincoat and carry an umbrella! Resist, as best you can, that childhood temptation to step in mud puddles on the way into the church..... Susan

**"Whoever is not against us is for us."**

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

**Thomaston, Maine**

**Sunday, September 26, 2021**

**Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet**

**Scripture: Mark 9:38-50**

John said to him [Jesus], “Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us.” But Jesus said, “Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. Whoever is not against us is for us. For truly I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward.

If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea. If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than to have two hands and to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame than to have two feet and to be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into hell, where their worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched.

For everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good; but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.”  
Mark 9:38-50

Will you pray with me. Hospitable God, we come to you this day eager to be received by you, but sometimes not so eager to receive one another in our differences. Help us to learn that you don't play favorites. Help us to accept that each one of us and all of us are welcome at your table now and forever. Amen.

John said to him [Jesus], “Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us.” But Jesus said, “Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. **Whoever is not against us is for us.** (Mk 9:38-40)

Can't you just imagine what Jesus was saying under his breath. “John, John, John... For God's sake, this discipleship thing is NOT ‘all about you.’” Again and again in the Gospels, Jesus' first male disciples indicate they believe they are very special. They think they have the “inside scoop” on what it means to follow Jesus. Nobody can do it better than they can!

Yet just twenty or thirty verses before our text for today, the disciples are not able to cast out a demon from a boy “with a spirit that makes him unable to speak.” (Mk 9:17) When the disciples ask Jesus why they could not cast out the demon, he answers, “This kind can come out only through prayer.” (Mk 9:29) It seems the disciples have the want, but they don't have the will.

I wonder about this for myself some days. I have the *want*, but I wonder if I have the *will*. How about you? We say we want to do good, to be followers of

Jesus' way, to be hospitable to all others, to serve rather than be served, to be compassionate and considerate of one another. Yet some days, I find myself coming up pretty short. How about you?

The disciples knew how to draw lines in the sand. They thought they were on one side of the line, arm in arm with Jesus, while everyone else was on the other side of the line, clearly not worthy of their attention because Jesus hadn't chosen *them*. He chose John and Peter and the other ten.

Last Sunday I talked about the three most important things to keep in mind when studying a passage from the Bible... context, context, context. And today it seems the most important thing to keep in mind is this – to use a common phrase from today's vernacular – *"It's all about me" is not what Jesus had in mind in his teaching and way of living.* It's about the other guy, the outcaste, the woman scorned because of rumors about her, the widow, the orphan, the men and women seized by demons of all kinds, the lost and lonely, the lepers, those dead to life but eager to be brought back into the fold of God. It's all about *them*, it's not *"all about me."*

That's a tough sell in this country – in social circles, political circles, and even in religious circles. We want "our kind" to be favored, not the other guy's kind. "Whoever is not against us is for us," Jesus said to John. (Mk 9:40) That's a very tough sell here, and in other parts of the world. Why can't we get this? Why can't we believe and accept that *our* way is not the *only* way to the good life, to God? Any ideas? (get responses)

I have to be honest. I really struggle with this question, especially in this politically charged time in our country. As much as I believe I am a very inclusive person – socially, politically, and religiously – I find myself wanting to exclude people who don't agree with me. Am I the only one here who does that? In a way, I guess I wish I *was* the only one, because it's not very pretty. I have the *want* to be a disciple of Jesus, but some days I don't seem to have the *will*.

Yet the end of the passage for today does give me something to chew on as I chastise myself for being weak and self centered. Jesus talks about salt and the positive benefits of saltiness. I just love the way Jesus uses the basic stuff of life to make his point again and again. After he's given his disciples some pretty dramatic examples of what they can do with their various body parts if they don't get their discipleship acts together, he says to them, "For everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good; but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another." (Mk 9:49-50)

Salt – white crystals used in food preparation, something that adds zest, flavor... Then there are the ways salt is used metaphorically:

“to rub salt in the wound is to add to somebody’s distress, embarrassment, or sense of shame, often deliberately,” as in when we make a snide remark when someone we don’t like or agree with slips up and makes a mistake.

“to take something with a grain of salt – to listen to something without fully believing it,” as in when we say, “Take what he says with a grain of salt, he doesn’t know what he’s talking about and he’s angry at the world anyway.”

“the salt of the earth – a very good, worthy person or group of people,” as in “Ben was the salt of the earth.”

“worth your salt – efficient and doing the job well,” as in “Now that guy is worth his salt!”

So... it’s our choice as to whether we’re going to rub salt in somebody’s wound, or be taken with a grain of salt, or be known as the salt of the earth, or be worth anybody’s salt. Some days, I think I am far more skilled at the first two than the latter two. How about you?

Some days I think we have to look extra hard for the salt of the earth, but it’s there, or rather here among us. Some years ago, my colleague and friend, Pastor Mair Honan, sent me an e-mail that had to do with something that happened on the streets of Portland. Mair started Grace Street Ministries more than a decade ago in Portland. Talk about a tough congregation to connect with! It’s the folks living on the streets in Portland! Mair wrote to me, “During hard times doubts arise – on a micro level this is the first year all of our grant applications (23) were denied. (This was over ten years ago.) This leaves us with only 4 months of operating funds. So, of course doubts – how could we have done better, where else? All of that...

[Mair continues], so yesterday on my way to Hannaford’s, I detoured to go down to our prayer and communion on the sidewalk. Elizabeth and I alternate Sundays and this was her week. I never really go down when she is facilitating. As I walked up the street seeing her laying out bread and juice on the TV table and seeing her gathering the eight rag tag bunch into prayer, I felt so moved. A little spot of grace in all of it. There may be tornadoes of hate and ignorance whirling everywhere and we can still find grace-filled moments of truth. At times they don’t seem enough to me, but this was one moment when it felt perfectly fine.”

John, Jesus' disciple, didn't want anyone to steal his thunder as a follower of Jesus. He was more concerned with want than will. On the sidewalks of Portland, lots of folks rush by one another, well dressed, and in a hurry to get to their high paying jobs in the multifloored office towers. Other folks live on the streets of Portland and gather around a TV tray to receive holy communion with a pastor committed to including them in the family of Jesus who beckons each one of us, no matter our want, no matter our will.

Jesus taught his disciples, "Whoever is not against us, is for us." (Mark 9:40) ....and spiced up that proclamation with a new recipe, "Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another." (Mark 9:50)

I worry about rubbing salt in the wound of the one with whom I don't like or agree, all the while hoping someday when I grow up, I'll be just like Ben here in Thomaston, or Bessie Dean in Lincolnton, both models of "the salt of the earth."

Pastor Mair wonders if it's all worth it on the streets of Portland and then witnesses the presence of Jesus in the midst of a rag tag bunch on a street corner... receiving communion around a TV tray.

"May [we all] have salt in [our]selves, and be at peace with one another."

Let the people say, "Amen."

**Federated Church in Thomaston**  
**United Church of Christ    United Methodist Church**  
**All Are Welcome**  
**Sunday, September 26, 2021**

Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet, Pastor    Alice Billheimer, Organist/ Choir Director  
Lector: Richard Kortright  
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.

*"Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another." Mark 9:50*

**GATHERING FOR WORSHIP**

**Welcome and Announcements**

**Prelude** “Blessed Trinity” Edgar Elgar (arr. George Black)

**Call to Worship**

Leader: When can we count on God to help us, and when does God expect us to use our own God-given talents to help ourselves?

**People: Are we ever beyond help?**

**All: Let us worship the God who gives, receives and stands by us in all times. Amen.**

**\*Opening Hymn** “All Beautiful the March of Days” 36 Red Hymnal

**An Invocation....**

**Responsive Reading** James 5:13-20 (see insert)

A Moment of Silence

**SERVICE OF THE WORD**

**Scripture Reading** Mark 9:38-50

**\*Gloria Patri**

**Message** “Whoever is not against us is for us” Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet

**\*Hymn of Meditation** “Trust and Obey” 467 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** “God Walks Beside Me” Lani Smith

**\*Doxology No. 95 Blue**

**\*Prayer of Dedication**

**\*Closing Hymn** “Now Thank We All Our God” 307 Red Hymnal

**Benediction**

**Postlude** "Paeon" Roy E. Nolte

**Revised Common Lectionary Readings for Sunday, October 3, 2021**

**Job 1:1, 2:1-10; Psalm 26; Hebrews 1:1-4, 2:5-12; Mark 10:2-16**

**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 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**

Saturday-10/2/21 .....9:00 am -12:00 pm: Benefit Yard Sale

Sunday-10/3/21.....9:30 am: Holy Communion Service

Suggested Food Pantry

Donation..... Peanut Butter

The flowers this week are given by Pastor Susan Stonestreet and Nance Brown in memory of loved ones.

Deacon for October: Sandra Caron

Reminders for next Sunday, 10/3/21

Greeter/Usher: Kathleen

Anderson

Lect

or:

Flowers: Mary Lou

Steger

Collection Total for Sunday, September 19, 2021:

Pledges -	\$448.00
Loose -	\$ 95.91
Rental - (WW of Me.)	\$ 80.00
Total -	\$623.91

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

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

***Sunday, September 26, 2021***

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