

Good Easter Sunday morning from a still somewhat snow covered but sunny hill in Rockport!

I know, I know..... We would all rather be gathering this morning in the sanctuary of the Federated Church of Thomaston! I certainly would..... but instead, we are in our own homes, doing our best to make the best of an incredibly gut wrenching and challenging situation here and around the world.... BUT, IT'S EASTER! Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed!

....as the traditional Easter Sunday Service usually begins..... BUT, we are not in any way "traditional" this morning, so I will invite you to experience this service via your computer screens, or paper copy if you choose to print this from the attachment I'll add to the e-mail.... And, for those of you who are local and a part of the Federated congregation, be sure to call up Alice and Dave's Easter Sunday's hymn selections which you have received via their e-mail address. Many thanks to them for helping us experience Easter Sunday via music of the season!

AND, I'm sending you my sermon piece in written form and via "live" transmission..... You may tune in to it via my brand new Facebook page: freerangepastor. Just go to that Facebook page and scroll down the page until you come to.... me!..... sitting in our living room with my laptop in my lap!

Note that I won't be sending out a daily meditation tomorrow or Tuesday, as the pastor could use a few days of rest from thinking about anything more serious than where the next puzzle piece goes in the jigsaw puzzle Nance and I are currently working on.... but I'll plan to be back to my daily meditations come Wednesday. Talk amongst yourselves – at a safe distance from one another, of course – over the next two days, but know you may be in touch with me by e-mail or phone in case of emergency anytime.... Now, this morning's "Simple Easter Service" coming to you via e-mail and attachment....

**A simple online worship service for Sunday, April 12, 2020 – Easter Sunday
as prepared by Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet
Pastor of the Federated Church of Thomaston**



Opening Prayer

There are alleluias in the air,
that skip a beat as they dance over tombs,
that push at stones and reveal a savior,
that explode with a slow beauty in the sunrise,
that wake the birds and rise at dawn.
It is God's holy word: Christ is risen!
Christ is risen, indeed!
Let us worship God!
Amen.

A Prayer of Possibility on Easter Sunday

Though it hardly seems possible now,
we cling to the hope that God's City will be established
in the gift of the new heavens and the new earth.

Our work is to live by the customs
of the new City before it has fully come to be.
In this way, the church draws the world to God.

We hold forth not a condemning,
but a welcoming word.

All nations are invited to come to this City.
And the quality of our interactions as a community
will be a stronger witness than our words.

The vibrancy of our worship
will be a beacon of light that draws people home
from the long darkness they have endured.

Amen.

(Adapted from words of Gerrit Scott Dawson in *Called by a New Name*)



A Reading of Scripture – John 20:1-18

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes.

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and other at the feet. They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

John 20:1-18

My sermon this morning isn't a sermon of the more traditional kind. It's a letter. Have you ever written one of those letters you never intend to send – like one to someone who has done you wrong, or an angry letter to the editor to get something off your chest about a community matter, or to a loved one who has died? My letter this morning is to one who has died – Mary, not as in Mary, the mother of Jesus, but as in Mary Magdalene, Jesus' friend, who is the only one named in all four Gospel tellings of the Resurrection who was there at the tomb after his death.

“Whom are you looking for?”
A letter to Mary Magdalene from Pastor Susan
for the Federated Church of Thomaston
Thomaston, Maine
Sunday, April 12, 2020 – Easter
Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet
Scripture: John 20:1-18

Dear Mary,

I'm writing to you from two thousand plus years ahead. I'm writing because it's Easter morning and we're in a mess here. We need some advice about how to go forward. We need some consolation in the midst of much illness and death because of an obnoxious virus that is affecting people around the world, even in our little corner of it right here in midcoast Maine. I wish you could see our lovely little coastline, Mary. I think you'd like it....

This morning I can't get the story of your visit to Jesus' tomb out of my mind. It seems like something out of this world, literally, like a dream – a bad dream that turned into a good one. This letter I'm writing to you is kind of like the letters that fellow Paul wrote to the people of so many cities and towns in your day. He just wanted to tell them how he felt about them and about Jesus.

I mean here you were with us in our reading from the Gospel of John this morning, and it was two thousand years ago that the Scriptures tell us *YOU*, a *WOMAN*, was the first witness to Jesus' resurrection. *YOU* were the first one told to go and tell of his going to his Father, our Father, God, after he was crucified.

First, I couldn't get over your sadness at losing your good friend... your Teacher... your Lord... You were so devoted to him.

When his disciples turned and ran away,
when they fell asleep,
when one of them even denied he knew Jesus,
when another betrayed him, you stayed.

You wept, Mary.

You wondered what you were going to do now.

You must have felt like you were in a bad dream, too, Mary.

I just wanted you to know that I, as a pastor, and all here this morning, shared in your sadness at first. We sensed your loss and could feel your aloneness.

I need to tell you, though, that we are not all of the same mind or heart about Jesus. Some of us are devout Christians – followers of Jesus, sure of our faith, confident in what will come to us after we die.

Others of us are not so sure about calling ourselves Christians. Some of us have doubts, many doubts. Some don't know if they believe all this stuff about Jesus' resurrection. Frankly, some think it's just a made up story and it doesn't really have anything to do with us now.

But I just had to write to tell you, Mary,
that your passion,
your love for your Teacher Jesus,
your devotion to staying with him even unto his death to care for him even after his death
gives us all pause.

All of it makes us wonder if we would do the same for Jesus, for any beloved in our lives,
even for a stranger.

Would we have your courage?

Would we stay and tend to the needs of the one who has died when all others have run
away?

You show us how to be people of good and strong faith, Mary.

You show us how to stand up for what is right and good and just – when there is so much
wrong and meanspirited and well, unchristian, going on in our world today – sometimes even
coming from people who call themselves Christians. I just needed to write this down to tell you
that.

Jesus asked you whom you were looking for.

And I, as a pastor, find myself wondering who I am looking for.

I wonder who all the people who with me this morning, each worshipping from our homes
because of this deadly pandemic.... who are WE looking for?

And more than WHO we are looking for, WHAT are we looking for?

You found a man, this Jesus, who accepted you for who you were, with all your faults
and frailties.... and you followed him. You followed him in life, and you followed him in death.
No love can be greater than that which causes a person to be with their beloved Teacher even
unto death.

But then I sensed you wanted to hold onto Jesus and he didn't want you to do that. It
must have been like in a good dream we don't want to end. We want it to go on forever. We
reach out for it, and then it is gone.

Jesus left your sight. But he didn't leave your heart or your mind or your soul, Mary.
You went to the disciples, as Jesus instructed you to do, and you told them what he had said to
you.

We owe you a great debt of gratitude, Mary. If it hadn't been for you, and the other
women who appeared in the other gospel tellings of Jesus' resurrection, we might not be
gathering this morning to celebrate Easter.

There might never have become a Christian faith, because no one else might have had
your courage to tell the story.

But because you did have the courage the story didn't end.

It became clearer and even stronger after Jesus' death than before.

Your love for the one who had taught you so much about life and about God is a beacon
of hope for all of us, Mary.

Your witness is our encouragement this day. We are in a mess. We need all the
encouragement we can get because there seems no clear path to a brighter day in the weeks and
months to come.

Your seeking out of your Lord is the best example of how we are to keep on seeking out
who and what we are looking for in life, in our relationships, in our church family, in our quest
after the holy. For it is the holy in life, Mary, that makes us all beloved children of God, the
grand parent of us all. You teach us what is holy. You teach us that with life comes challenge

and disaster. With dying come sadness and eternal rest. With faith comes hope and love. And the greatest of these is love. You, of all people, Mary know about the power of love in each of our lives.

I just had to write, Mary, to say thank you – for your trust, your passion, your confident faith in your Lord, and your willingness to stand up for Jesus and for us all.

With blessings for all good things and with thanksgiving for this day, I write with a distant admiration and love for your presence in Jesus' life and death and in ours, too. Susan

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



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, Eve Anderson, Mimi's Uncle Doug and Aunt BJ, Heather Van Buskirk, and Muriel's grandson Jared.... and all those affected by the coronavirus and the families of those who have died from the virus. *Please send me the names of those you would like for me to add to this list next Sunday!*

A Benediction



*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 next Sunday, April 19, 2020

Acts 2:14a, 22-32; Psalm 16; 1 Peter 1:3-9; John 20:19-31

Words for Easter Sunday.....

“Faith in the resurrection of Jesus comes to some of us, not through reasoned consideration of the evidence, not by some tangible proof, but rather through trust – trust in the power of the risen Christ working in us. We each come to the mystery of the resurrection through our own path, for God reveals such a mystery to us in various ways, according to our need and our ability.”

~ Methodist Bishop William H. Willimon in “Getting to Easter,” a sermon

*“To believe in something not yet proved and to underwrite it with our lives; it is the only way we can leave the future open.” ~ Lillian Smith in *The Journey**