

The First Community Church of Southborough  
137 Southville Road  
Southborough, Massachusetts 01772-1937  
The Reverend Paul D. Sanderson, D.Min., Ph.D. – Pastor  
[www.firstcommunitychurch.com](http://www.firstcommunitychurch.com)  
Church: (508) 485-2607  
Pastor: (508) 543-7160  
Email: [paulsandersonphd@gmail.com](mailto:paulsandersonphd@gmail.com)

Blessings, Everyone!

October 11, 2020

### **Keeping in Touch With Our Church Family**

#### **Concerns:**

#### **We hold in prayer:**

- those who have lost loved ones at least partially due to COVID-19
- those who are separated from loved ones due to the pandemic restrictions
- those who cannot visit loved ones who are in the hospital or in nursing homes due to the pandemic restrictions
- those whose jobs have been lost, whose businesses have been shut down, or whose lives have been disrupted or upended due to the pandemic
- those who are suffering from the devastating fires in California that have consumed over four million acres, the worst fires in California's history
- those who are suffering from the recent tropical storms/hurricanes in Louisiana
- those who suffer from the stain on their soul that is called racism or white nationalism or white supremacy
- our country. Pray for our country!! Really!!! It stands in need of good vibrations!

#### **Thank you to:**

- Jim Holmes – for faithfully ringing the church bell at 11:00 a.m. every Sunday morning to remind our neighbors that we are here and for sending us pictures of the church, so we remember what it looks like
- all those who have been faithful in their yearly pledges to the General Fund
- the new members of our church family who are supporting us financially in ways that are helping us survive this difficult time
- the Diaconate, who have been meeting to discuss various options regarding worship services and the procedure we will need to follow regarding the eventual reopening of our church

### **Sunday Worship as the Gathered Church**

When it seems reasonable to resume our discussion of the possibility of meeting again for worship in person, we will call a meeting of an expanded Church Council. Present at this meeting will be the Pastor, the Moderator, the Clerk, the Treasurer, the Collector, our Organist/Choir Director, the members of the Diaconate and anyone else who would like to attend. If the Covid-19 restrictions are still in place, we may meet in the sanctuary where we can observe safe social distancing.

#### **Missions:**

We recently received a letter from The Tibet Fund, through which our church sponsors Tenzin Norzom, a little Tibetan girl who is studying at Youngling Elementary School in Dharamsala, India. Her family lives in the Tibetan refugee community in Dharamsala.

*Dear Reverend Sanderson and the members of The First Community Church of Southborough,*

*Tashi Delek! I hope this email finds you and everyone in the First Community Church doing well and saying safe.*

*On behalf of the Board of Directors and the staff of the Tibet Fund, thank you for your generous contribution of \$360, your yearly sponsorship of Tenzin Norzom. Your generous gift will enable Yongling School to provide healthy meals, basic necessities, and adequate healthcare to your sponsored student, Tenzin.*

*We are still working remotely from home to ensure safety and wellbeing to everyone.*

*With gratitude, as always, and please take care. Stay safe!*

*Yangzom Shawa*

Ever since I returned from my first trekking pilgrimage through Nepal and Tibet in the summer of 1999, our church has sponsored a child living in the Tibetan refugee community in Dharamsala, India. We have sponsored several children over the years; our current sponsored child, Tenzin, is being brought up within her traditional Tibetan culture, who is learning in her native language, and who is being taught about her religion—Tibetan Buddhism. We are happy to have made this possible for children and their families who have been forced to flee their homeland, Tibet, following the Chinese invasion in 1959. Spending a few days in Dharamsala, where the Dalai Lama resides, was one of the high points in the travels Corey and I took through India as well as Nepal and Tibet.

### **Audio Weekly Worship Service**

We are offering a pre-recorded weekly worship service that I record in my home study or office, not in the sanctuary. This service can be accessed directly through the home page of our church website: [www.firstcommunitychurch.com](http://www.firstcommunitychurch.com); it is in the audio section of the sermon section. Each service will be listed by date. The order of service is as follows:

*Music*

*Call to Worship*

*Prayer of Invocation*

*Scripture Lesson(s)*

*Reflection*

*Pastoral Prayer and the Lord's Prayer*

*Benediction*

*Music*

The Reflection will be the reflection that I am currently sending to those of you who are on our expanded church contact list, a list that is comprised of church members, members of our larger church family, and friends of the church, those who have asked to be put on our mailing list. The reflection is also accessible in printed form on our website in the sermon section.

We are currently in the process of compiling a list of church members who do not use the internet so we can mail a printed copy of my reflection to them every week. If you know of anyone who falls into this category, please let me know.

There is, of course, no substitute for meeting together as the gathered church for Sunday worship in our beautiful sanctuary and then celebrating fellowship in our coffee hour (or hour-and-a-half) semi-luncheon downstairs in the vestry following the service. We will return. I promise!

I have heard from several people who have already accessed the recorded worship services for September 27 and October 4, and they assure us that it is easy to do. Many thanks to David Crane who takes what I send him, puts it in the proper form, and posts it on the website!

### **Quote/Thought of the Day**

*"Be who God meant you to be, and you will set the world on fire!"*

Catherine of Siena

Catherine of Siena, who lived from 1347-1380 (not very long), was an Italian Dominican religious. Catherine and Francis are the patron saints of Italy.

### **A Second Quote/Thought of the Day**

*"You can observe a lot by just watching."* Yogi Berra

Lawrence Peter (Yogi) Berra was an 18-time All-Star who appeared in 14 World Series as a member of the New York Yankees (which won 10 of them).

### **Attention-Grabbling Church Signs**

*"If you are more fortunate than others, build a longer table, not a higher fence."*

### **Taken From (Apparently Unedited) Church Sunday Morning Bulletins**

*"The Pastor spoke briefly, much to the delight of the congregation."*

### **Interesting "Facts"**

*You probably know that the Los Angeles Dodgers were originally the Brooklyn Dodgers, that they were formed in Brooklyn, New York in 1890, and that they moved to L. A. in 1957 (which was when I stopped rooting for them). However, did you know that in the late nineteenth century, Brooklyn had hundreds of trolleys zigzagging through its streets, and pedestrians were constantly scurrying out of their way. That's why their baseball team was called the Brooklyn Trolley Dodgers, later shortened to Dodgers. The name now makes about as much sense as when the NBA New Orleans Jazz moved to Salt Lake City and became the Utah Jazz following the 1978-79 season. What the heck does Utah, a Mormon state, have to do with Jazz? Do you ever wake up in the middle of the night wondering what the Dodgers are dodging? Movie stars? Important people? Then again, maybe you don't.*

### **The Pastor's Reflection**

**(This reflection will be posted in an audio form as part of a devotional service on our church website: [www.firstcommunitychurch.com](http://www.firstcommunitychurch.com))**

**Scripture Lessons: Matthew 6:22-23 & 7:1-5  
Luke 7:36-50**

This coming Thursday, I will be receiving cataract surgery on my second eye. Actually, I don't have a "first eye" or a "second eye," and I'm not sure about the mystic "third eye," the intuitive or spiritual "eye" in the middle of one's forehead that provides us with a direct line of vision to the eternal. The surgery this Thursday will be on my left eye; my right eye was done last month. If you have cataracts, I highly recommend that you have them removed—and that you have it done professionally; don't try to do it on your own. I will explain why, but for one thing, "unless you're a better man than I am, Gunga Din," you will probably blink.

Even before I went for my yearly appointment with my new ophthalmologist (that spelling always seems funny to me), I had a sense that something was wrong. My vision, especially my distance vision, had become increasingly cloudy over the past six months or so. I experienced glare or light sensitivity when driving at night. I found I needed to utilize brighter light to read. And my eyesight was really poorer—I couldn't even read the large green signs marking the exits on a highway until I was right on top of them. I suspected the problem was cataracts, and I was correct. Small consolation.

I then found that I knew little about cataracts, and what I "knew" was mostly incorrect. My ophthalmologist (words should really be spelled like they sound) informed me that a cataract is not a film over the eye, which is what I thought it was, and that she would not be scraping it off with a scalpel, which was what I assumed. She told me that it is not caused by

overusing the eyes (I thought it might have been a God-punishment for reading the wrong stuff, that “liberal” stuff). She said it is a clouding of the normally clear lens of the eye, and that it could be compared to a window that is frosted or opaque. The cloudiness does not always occur in the entire lens, and if it is not near the center of the lens, one might not be aware that a cataract is present. She also informed me that they do not remove the entire lens and replace it, rather they excise a circular spot in the center of the lens by making a lot of little cuts. Then they break the spot apart by ultrasound (really cool!) and vacuum up the little pieces (also really cool!). They then fit the new lens, a permanent intraocular lens implant, which can give you better distance vision (a monofocal lens) or better overall vision (a trifocal lens) in between the layers of the old lens. Now you are hopefully beginning to see why it would not be a good idea to try this at home. The lens that is inserted is not like a contact lens, which is bigger and covers the outside of the entire lens (which is what I had originally thought).

I learned that the most common type of cataract is related to ageing of the eye. However, cataracts can also be caused by genes, medical problems such as diabetes, injury to the eye, medications (especially steroids), radiation, and long-term unprotected exposure to sunlight. I didn't have any of these, except the last one, which I admit is largely due to my stubbornly enduring (not endearing) stupidity (especially in light of my recurring melanoma, for which I will be receiving another treatment on the top of my head next month) and a stubborn reticence to seeing the sun as my enemy. Not without reason do I hold this view; I have always seen the sun as my friend and the friend of all life on earth. Just think—if our sun suddenly burned out, went black, or disappeared, we would be in serious trouble in a very short period of time. You may think that the current pandemic is trouble, but, believe me, the loss of our sun would be much worse. My dermatologist disagrees, not with my reasoning but with my basic premise that the sun is my friend—she thinks the sun can kill me. I have to admit that she (and my wife and my daughter, who constantly harass me) have a point.

My ophthalmologist was not convinced that I “got” my cataracts from increased exposure to light waves or energy emitted from my computer screen at which, over the past seven months, I have been staring approximately eight to ten hours a day (Zoom therapy sessions plus emails plus word processing) instead of the previous one or two hours. I hate to disagree with her (no I don't), but I still think it is a factor. I am also considering purchasing those eyeglasses that protect the eyes from computer strain. This whole computer thing, the Zoom connection instead of sitting down with people person-to-person in my office has proven more difficult, more taxing, more demanding, and more exhausting than I thought it would. BTW, just in case you are wondering, no medications, dietary supplements, exercises, or even specific prayers of supplication have been shown to prevent or cure cataracts.

From the other meaning of the word “cataract:” a large waterfall, and the way the word is commonly used in a sentence, i.e., as a noun, I assumed it was a thing (like a contact lens), a thing that we don't want, and which we choose to have removed and thrown away. It is apparently more of a condition than a thing. It is a condition of the lens that causes the lens to scatter light rather than focus the light precisely on the retina, which is why it affects our eyesight. It is a condition that affects the way we see. It is a condition that prevents us from being able to see clearly.

If we have a condition that negatively affects the way we see, we need to restore our sight, our proper, healthy vision. We need to remove the part of our eye, of our vision, that isn't working well and replace it with a new lens, a new way of seeing. We can see better if we remove the obstacles that get in the way of clear vision. It doesn't take much to mess up the way we see. Remember, a single maple leaf can cover the entire moon, which is really big, if we hold the leaf close enough to our eyes. It doesn't take much to mess up the way we see other people. And it doesn't take much to mess up the way we see ourselves. In simple terms, the lesson of the cataract is that we have to let the Light in.

Not to get philosophical (I always say this when I am about to get philosophical), but when we see something, are we seeing something “out there” or are we seeing something inside our head? More to the point, when we have difficulty seeing, is the problem in the eye? Or is it in our mind, in our understanding? Or is it in our heart, in our inability to love? I think Jesus would tell us that the primary problem is with the heart, that the heart, then, affects the mind, the way we understand, and that the heart and the mind together affect the eye, the way that we see. Jesus saw, understood, and loved, though probably in the reverse order. He then taught us, called us, to do the same. If we could all do this, it would solve an awful lot of problems!

One of the many things, factors, conditions, that can affect our sight, the clarity of our vision, our ability to see other people as they are, to see other people as Jesus sees them, is the dynamic of judging. This is, admittedly, a psychological factor. BTW, this matter of judging also affects our ability to see ourself clearly, to see ourself the way Jesus sees us. If you don't believe me, talk to someone who is a perfectionist, who struggles under the burden of perfectionism. Ask that person how he/she “sees” everything he/she does, how he/she understands it, and how he/she feels about it. Then you will see why we should not be proud of being a perfectionist, how it prevents us from being able to accept and love ourself in a healthy way. BTW, perfectionists commonly say that they are much more critical of themselves than they are of other people, that they hold themselves to a higher standard than they do for other people. R i g h t . .

In the first of our scripture lessons, the passage from the 7<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Gospel According to Matthew, following his teachings about not storing up treasures on earth and not worrying, Jesus tells us not to judge others. He says,

*Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your neighbor, “Let me take the speck out of your eye, while the log is in your own eye?” You hypocrite; first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye.*

I think Jesus might have had pastors and psychotherapists in mind when he said this. We are only too quick to try to take the speck out of our parishioners'/clients' eyes while, at the same time, we are blind to how we might suffer from the same or similar problems. “Physician, heal thyself!” is a good guideline for all of us who feel called to help others.

Notice how Jesus links judging to seeing. This is because judging affects how we see. When we judge someone, it affects, shapes, and even determines the way we see that person. It is also worth noting how Jesus uses the term “judging.” I am sure that he does not mean that we should never make judgments. We have to make judgments every day; we have to distinguish between what is right and what is wrong, what is healthy and what is unhealthy, what we should do and what we should not do. These are all judgments. C. G. Jung tells us that judging is the central dynamic of our feeling function; it tells us what we like and what we dislike, what we find acceptable and what we reject. This kind of judging is normal, natural, and healthy. Making a judgment about something or someone is different from being judgmental, which is what I think Jesus identified as affecting our vision in a negative way. The Greek word that is translated as “judge,” *krino*, implies condemnation. Jesus warns us against superficial and unfair judgments, for example, the judgments of hypocrites who criticize others while being blind to or ignoring their own faults.

When we find ourself judging someone, or a group of someones, Jesus tells us that we should first turn the spotlight on ourself. We should look at ourself. If we do this, we may become less inclined to throw stones. We may even learn and grow through the process of self-reflection. We may become more conscious of what Jung called our shadow: that part of us

which we do not like to own, that we resist making conscious, and that, consequently, we repress, rationalize, or project onto other people, enabling us to judge them for what is actually a part of us. We need to take the log out of our own eye if we are to have any hope of helping our neighbor remove the speck that clouds his/her vision. I recently heard a little story that makes this point.

*A young couple moved into a new neighborhood.*

*The next morning while they were eating breakfast, the young woman, looking out of her kitchen window, saw her neighbor hanging the washing on her clothesline. "That laundry is not very clean," she commented to her husband. "That woman apparently doesn't know how to wash correctly. Perhaps she needs better laundry soap."*

*Her husband looked on, remaining silent.*

*Over the next month or so, every time her neighbor hung her washing out to dry, the young woman made the same criticism.*

*One morning, the woman was surprised to see a nice clean wash on the next-door neighbor's line. "Look," she told her husband. "She has finally learned how to wash correctly. I wonder who taught her this?"*

*The husband replied, "I got up early this morning and cleaned our windows."*

The little story teaches us that what we see when we watch others depends on the clarity of the window through which we look. It depends upon our eyes, to be sure. But it also depends upon our mind and our heart. We should not be so quick to criticize, to judge others, especially if our perspective on life, on others, is clouded by anger, jealousy, negativity, or fear. As someone has said, "Judging a person does not define who they are. It defines who you are."

The act of judging another, in the biblical sense of being judgmental of the other, can be caused by ignorance or by prejudice. Prejudice, bias, stereotyping are forms of seeing and judging, forms of seeing and judging that are grounded in ignorance and fear. Prejudice is a cloudy way of seeing. Prejudice is seeing through a distorted lens. It becomes a barrier that stands in the way of our ability to understand the other person, to understand with empathy and compassion. It can affect our ability to listen, our ability to hear. The cloudy, distorted lens of prejudice arises from an inner psychological condition that shapes the way we see, understand, and feel. It is *our* problem, though our problem invariably creates serious problems for the other person/race/ethnic group/sexual orientation/religion/gender, or other minority that is the target of our prejudice, the recipient of our projections.

Our second scripture lesson, which is taken from the Gospel According to Luke, is a variation of the passage that we referenced last week, the passage describing a sinful woman's anointing of Jesus. The passage in Luke, which appears earlier in Jesus' ministry and with a slightly different twist than it does in the other gospels, reads as follows:

*One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and took his place at the table. And a woman in the city, who was a sinner, having learned that he was eating in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster jar of ointment. She stood behind him at his feet, weeping, and began to bathe his feet with her tears and to dry them with her hair. Then she continued kissing his feet and anointing them with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw it, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him—that she is a sinner." Jesus spoke up and said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." "Teacher," he replied, "Speak." "A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he canceled the debts for both of them. Now which of*

*them will love him more? Simon answered, "I suppose the one for whom he canceled the greater debt." And Jesus said to him, "You have judged rightly." Then turning toward the woman, he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has bathed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little. Then he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." But those who were at the table with him began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" And he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."*

Note that Jesus asks Simon, "Do you see this woman?" It is clear that Simon does not. Of course, he sees her in a superficial sense, but he doesn't really see her. He doesn't see her in her depths. He does not see her the way Jesus does. This is because Simon has judged her; he has condemned her as a sinner, a prostitute. He sees the woman through a cloudy or distorted lens. He does not understand her. And he sees her through a cloudy, distorted heart. He is unable to see her as a child of God who might need understanding rather than judgment, who needs acceptance and love rather than condemnation. He cannot see her the way Jesus sees the leper, the rich young man, the Roman centurion, the tax collector whom he chose as a disciple. He cannot see her the way Jesus sees Peter, who denied his Lord three times, and Judas, who betrayed him. He cannot see her the way Jesus saw even those who nailed him to the cross.

We need to see other people the way Jesus sees them. We need to remove or repair the cloudy, distorted, twisted, or deficient lens that prevents us from seeing them clearly. We need to remove the barriers to understanding, the barriers that prevent us from looking past a person's behavior to the factors, the inner dynamics that give rise to behavior. And we need to remove the protective covering around our heart, the armor that keeps us safe, but which prevents us from loving. In other words, we need to take on the heart and the mind of Jesus. When we do this, we will be truly letting the Light in.

There is so much distance and distortion in our relationships, even from those we love, due to the COVID-19 restrictions. We are forced to see every stranger, not as a friend whom we have yet to meet, but as a potential carrier of death. We really do need to look at everyone, even those we know and love, as dangerous. For the time being, we need to look at others through the psychological lens of fear. But this should be only a temporary way of seeing. When we see deeper, it moves us to acts of social responsibility, acts of caring that are grounded in our deep sense of interconnectedness, acts of love that transcend alienation. I confess that it is an especially difficult challenge for me to look deeper into people who come down on a different part of the political spectrum than I do. I seldom make the effort to really understand them, their preference for certain candidates whom I despise, the underlying psychological dynamics that lead them to make the choices they make. This is why it is so difficult to engage in creative dialogue with those who envision a different future for our nation, and why creative dialogue or constructive conflict resolution has devolved into a power play.

If we are to make peace, both inner and outer, which we desperately need to do, we need to move past our judgmental attitudes, past our prejudices, biases, and stereotypes to see each other as we really are. We need to move past seeing others through the distorted lens of our egocentric world view, judging them on the basis of this limited and self-serving perspective. In order to do this, we first need to hold up a mirror to ourself that we might become conscious of our own shadow, that which we project onto others. Jesus can also help us by holding up this mirror through his teaching.

In the 6<sup>th</sup> chapter of Matthew, the section just before the teaching on not worrying (which is also good advice for us nowadays), Jesus continues to unfold this powerful metaphor of the eye. He says,

*The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light; but if your eye is unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!*

If we can remove the cloudy lens of prejudice and judgment, if we can make our eye healthy and sound once again, we will be able to move through this difficult time with grace. We will be able to grow in the process, and we will be able to create a better society, a better world. We need to overcome the dichotomization, the polarization that grips our society and the world if we are to go through this time of trial *together*. The first step in being able to do this is to remove that cloudy lens from our eyes. If we do not do this, over time the light in us will go out, and we (and our nation and the world) will live in a great and terrible darkness.

And so, I say to you, be well. Stay safe. Be patient. Be disciplined. Persevere. Don't give up. Think of others. Care. Keep the faith. Focus on the broader, the bigger vision. See through the illusion, the delusion of the self-cherishing mind, the thief that takes away our sense of inner peace and that brings suffering to ourselves and others. Trust in God. Don't throw anything precious away. Repair the breaks in your life and in your relationships with gold. Take time to be with nature, to be in nature, to appreciate landscapes. Be socially responsible. Think about what it means to be a real Christian. Learn how to care and not to care; learn how to sit still, to be centered. Face what's wrong with our nation and the world, accept it, and then do everything you can to fix it. You are not working alone. Remove the log from your own eye that you might see your neighbor more clearly, that you might actually be able to help your neighbor remove the speck from his/her eye. Don't be so darned judgmental; it doesn't help anyone, even you. Restore the health to your third eye, your spiritual eye, to your way of seeing. Don't descend into darkness. Don't let the light go out.

Pastor Paul