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**May 2, 2021
The Fifth Sunday of Easter
Orthodox Easter**



(Photo credit—Darlene Sanderson, Easter season 2019)

Keeping in Touch

Concerns:

A colleague and friend, a former Dominican nun, once told me that a Jesuit priest who was teaching a course on prayer told them that when they pray, they should hold something in each hand. In one hand, they should hold the Bible; in the other, a current newspaper. I think the Old Testament prophets as well as recent “saints” who champion the cause of justice would agree!

Our Nation, the World, our Planet

We hold in prayer:

- Our country. We stand in need of prayer for healing the fear that has polarized our people around political and social issues. Our tribalistic mentality, especially our white nationalism, needs to be replaced with a new, more inclusive, more enlightened vision of who we are as Americans, and we need the patience and dedication to make the true American way of life a reality for all people. We also need to stop killing each other.
- Our world. We stand in need of a vision of world community, a world where people care about each other and where we know deep down that we are all in this together. If we have learned one thing from this pandemic it is how interconnected, how interrelated we all are.
- Nature. Our environment. The world in which we live. The animals that are in danger of extinction. The melting ice cap. The rising seas. Marine scientists have recently announced that they have found 27,345 barrels that contain DDT dumped in a 56 square mile area off the Southern California between Santa Catalina Island and the Los Angeles coast, a region that has historically reported high levels of DDT in sediments and the ecosystem. Apparently, this area was used as a dumping ground until the passage of the Ocean Dumping Act in 1972. This is a good example of why we need government to regulate business and industry!
- The 1 in 10 American children who live in poverty, who are food insecure, under constant threat of eviction from their homes, and who may be stressed by the threat of neighborhood violence. A lot of people, a lot of families, a lot of children need our help.
- Income inequality. I suppose we should celebrate the fact that, during this past year, when so many people in our country suffered from the ravages of the pandemic, when 3.4 million people filed for unemployment, 56 new billionaires were created in the United States—an average of a little over one a week. America’s 660 billionaires now account for 4.1 trillion dollars of accumulated wealth annually, an increase of 38.6% over the year before. Aren’t you glad that

at least someone is doing well during this difficult time? Or do you think there is something wrong with the system? BTW, 55 big businesses paid no US income tax on more than \$40 billion in profits last year; in fact, they received a combined federal rebate of more than \$3 billion, for an effective tax rate of approximately *negative* 9%. How much did you pay last year?

- The families and friends of the more than 550,000 in our country and the more than 3,500,000 around the world who have died from COVID-19; for those who have suffered from this disease, especially those with symptoms that linger; and those whose lives have been disrupted in serious ways because of the pandemic restrictions. BTW, being asked to wear a mask and socially distance does not qualify as a serious disruption in one's life and does not entitle one to receive intercessory prayer. We should also pray for a vaccine against stupidity to be immediately put into service for those who have decided not to be vaccinated because they are convinced that the coronavirus is not real, it is a hoax, and for the approximately 5 million people (8% of those who got a first shot of the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines) who are deciding to pass on their second vaccination because they might experience minor side effects. BTW, approximately 5% of Russians are now fully vaccinated; in the United States, it's 30%.
- India. India is in real trouble! Its death toll from the coronavirus now exceeds 200,000. Its hospitals are experiencing severe oxygen supply shortages. One day last week, just 10 ICU beds were available for COVID-19 patients in New Delhi, a city of more than 17 million people. India is now driving a worldwide surge in cases, accounting for 38% of infections recorded last week, largely because the multiple virus variants now circulating in India are linked with higher rates of transmission. The rest of the world (including us) needs to reach out to India, even though its current plight is largely due to a government that is as incompetent as our last administration in responding to the pandemic.
- The helpers. The front-line workers. The doctors and nurses.
- The victims and their families of the 125 mass shootings that have already occurred in our country in 2021. Let us pray that the will of the vast majority of people in both parties, the conviction that sensible restrictions on gun ownership, background checks, and the types of guns that can be purchased are in the best interest of everyone (except the NRA, gun manufacturers, and "patriotic" militias) be reflected in our representatives in Congress. BTW, this is not about taking rifles away from hunters.
- The members of the trans community who are currently under assault from Republican anti-trans legislation (see North Carolina, Mississippi, Arkansas, Kansas, Idaho), legislation which is essentially an assault on children, denying them the right to be who they are. So far this year, at least 12 trans or gender nonconforming people have been killed nationwide, including a 16-year-old trans boy and his 22-year-old nonbinary sibling, who were killed by their mother.

How, in God's name, did white heterosexuals become the "victims" of the LGBTQ community, a community that has suffered from stigmatization and prejudice even within their own families and their own churches, an abhorrence of who they are that, when internalized, has led LGBTQ youth to disproportionate rates of anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation, and actual suicide?!

- Joe Biden and Kamala Harris, our President and Vice President, and their new administration and cabinet. The rebuilding of our government so it can serve the function that is its charge: increasing the safety, security, and well-being of all our citizens, and being a shining light, a model of true functional democracy to the world.
- Asian Americans that are the latest target of a xenophobia that is inconsistent with the core beliefs and values of a nation that, from the beginning, was celebrated as the world's greatest example of a melting-pot society.
- Women. Especially the women and girls in Afghanistan who may lose their right to education, health care, freedom, the right to vote, and a voice over their own destiny as the Taliban moves into the vacuum we are leaving as we pull our troops out of Afghanistan and reimposes a regressive moral code.
- People who are asserting their right to have their country governed by democratic principles. This battle is being fought in our country and around the world. The military in Myanmar, which recently overthrew the democratically elected government of Win Myint and Aung San Suu Kyi, both of whom have been detained, to date have killed over 750 peaceful protesters. Russia has recently arrested over 1,500 protesters against Vladimir Putin's reign and his poisoning and imprisonment of Vladimir Navalny, Putin's most vocal critic. In our country, the GOP has recently introduced 351 pieces of legislation designed to disenfranchise our citizens, to limit the ability of certain demographics, specifically members of minority groups, to vote.

Personal Prayer Requests

We hold in prayer:

- Marilyn Page, one of Darlene's dearest friends, now living in Seattle. Marilyn is undergoing intensive treatment for multiple myeloma.
- Evelyn Till's son, Eddy, who is still recovering from a recent stroke.
- Beth Raymond, Martha Hubley's daughter, has informed us that Martha had a mild heart attack last Saturday. They put in a stent and put her on medications. She is presently home and is tired but "doing ok."

Beth would like us to know that phone calls, cards and prayers would be wonderful. Also, visits in the afternoon are ok; call the house (508-453-5404) first to see if she is up. Beth would also like to thank Jim Holmes for bringing her Paul's weekly emails; she reads these several times!

- Yesterday, Reverend Sanderson officiated at a graveside service for Pat Grogan, a long-time member of this church. Our thoughts and prayers are with Pat's daughters, her grandchildren, and her two special friends from First Community Church, Bev and Evelyn. We will miss her.


(If you are in need of prayer or if you know of someone who stands in need of prayer, and you would like to ask us to pray for them/you, please let me know.)

Thank you to:

- Those who have already turned in their 2021 pledges to the General Fund, and those Friends of the Church who have either already sent or pledged a special gift to support us financially in the year to come.

Celebrations

There is a special anniversary that we as a church need to celebrate! This past month, a certain young man who became affiliated with our church approximately eight years ago celebrated the 6th anniversary of his becoming clean and sober. This young man is now working in human resources with a specialty in addressing drug and alcohol problems/addictions and will be going back to school to finish his education and prepare for a career as a social worker. He should be very proud of what he has done, how he has turned his life around, and we wish him the very best!

	
<i>Birthdays</i>	
Angie Bird	1 st
Scott Webster	6 th
Cricket Port	10 th
Jan Bishop	13 th
Jeff Willman	22 nd
David Crane	23 rd
Nancy Mantos	30 th
Mason Renaud	31 st

COVID-19 and Sunday Worship as the Gathered Church

According to the guidelines issued at the beginning of March by the Southeastern Conference of the United Church of Christ, whether we will be meeting inside or outside, we will need to take several factors into consideration.

1. The number of people attending. If we are meeting inside, we need to limit participants to 10 people per 1,000 sq. ft. Whether inside or outside, we need to observe social distancing guidelines.
2. The overall number of people in our state and especially in our community who have the coronavirus and who could spread. I believe that the total number of cases in our state should certainly be under one thousand.
3. The percentage of people attending who have been fully vaccinated.
4. We will probably still have to surround at least the pulpit with plexiglass, especially if I do not wear a mask when I lead worship and preach.
5. If we are inside and wearing masks, it is probably not a good idea to sing hymns or participate in responsive readings. If we are outside and wearing masks—I believe we can do this. We can at least have music, even if we do not sing hymns.
6. We won't be able to share the Sacrament of Holy Communion, at least the way we customarily do, with each other.

Note: In light of recent CDC Guidelines, it appears that we do not need to have the church professionally cleaned following each use. The CDC now believes it is highly unlikely that any variant of the coronavirus can be spread by contact.

Audio Weekly Worship Service

We offer an abbreviated weekly worship service that is posted on the home page of our church website: www.firstcommunitychurch.com; it is in the audio section of the sermon section. Each service is listed by date. The reflection/homily is the same reflection that is sent to those 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 who have asked to be put on our contact list. The pastor's reflection is also accessible in printed form on our website in the sermon section.

If you would like to have a copy of the audio service/reflection (or this newsletter/reflection) emailed directly to you when it is recorded and printed (usually Saturday night or Sunday morning) rather than when it gets posted on our website (which can be several days later), please send an email to Reverend Sanderson and he can make it happen!

Quote/Thought of the Day on Patience

A quote or thought on patience is included in this newsletter every week because it is not only important for us in weathering this pandemic; it's one of the most important personality characteristics/qualities/gifts that we can have in life.

There is a new television series entitled *Kung Fu*—check it out. It is modeled after the 1970's series (which I loved) starring David Carradine, except the protagonist in this series is a young woman who really kicks butt (i.e., she is quite accomplished in this advanced form of martial arts)! The third episode, which is worth watching, contains a profound lesson about patience.

*“Be patient and understanding.
Life is too short to be vengeful or malicious.”*

Phillips Brooks

A Second Quote/Thought of the Day

*“We dance around in a ring and suppose,
But the Secret sits in the middle and knows.”*

Robert Frost

A Third Quote/Thought of the Day

*“Ring the bells that still can ring.
Forget your perfect offering.
There is a crack in everything.
That's how the light gets in.”*

Leonard Cohen

Worship Service Music

The Prelude for today's devotional service is taken from Georg Philipp Telemann's *Viola Concerto in G Major*, the first or *Largo* movement.

The Postlude is the third movement of this concerto: *Andante*.

Telemann was a German Baroque composer and multi-instrumentalist. Almost completely self-taught in music, he became a composer against his family's wishes. After studying in Magdeburg, Zellerfeld, and Hildesheim, Telemann entered the University of Leipzig to study law, but eventually settled on a career in music. He eventually became musical director of the five main churches in Hamburg. While Telemann's career prospered, his personal life was always troubled: his first wife died less than two years after their marriage, and his second wife had extramarital affairs and accumulated a large gambling debt before leaving him.

Telemann is one of the most prolific composers in history. He was considered by his contemporaries to be one of the leading German composers of the time, and he was compared favorably both to his friend Johann Sebastian Bach, who made Telemann the godfather and namesake of his son, Carl Philipp Emanuel, and to George Frederic Handel, whom Telemann also knew personally. Telemann's music incorporates French,

Italian, and German national styles, and was at times even influenced by Polish popular music. The Telemann Museum in Hamburg is dedicated to him.

BTW, if you would like me to send you a copy of the audio worship service that includes the preludes and postludes as soon as I record it every week, please email me and I would be happy to do so. Also, if you have difficulty making out the words on any of the preludes or postludes, please let me know and I will find a way to get them to you and the rest of our mailing list.