

The First Community Church of Southborough
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The Sixth Sunday of Easter

Ascension Sunday (Ascension Day is Thursday May 13)

Keeping in Touch

Concerns:

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.
- The families and friends of the more than 577,000 in our country and the more than 3,220,000 around the world who are documented as having 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 222,000 (120 people/hour) from at least 20 million cases. Maharashtra is particularly hard hit. 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 throughout the world 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 in responding to the pandemic as our last administration was. In the tradition of our past president, India's president Modi continues to hold large political rallies that are turning out to be super-spreaders.
- 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. This is a tough one for me. Usually when I ask a rhetorical question, I assume you know what to answer because the answer I would give is obviously the "right" one. In the matter of whether we should totally withdraw our troops from Afghanistan and leave the fledgling Afghan government to battle the Taliban, who already control most of the country, I am honestly confused.

I was never in favor of our invading Afghanistan; I didn't think Afghanistan (or Iraq) were responsible for September 11, 2001. However, once we moved in, supporting a fledgling government attempting to maintain control of the country in the face of a fiercely determined and militant Taliban, the ones (along with Pakistan) who sheltered Al-Qaeda, who were largely responsible for the attack. The problem is, as history shows us, when we withdrew from Vietnam and Laos, we left a vacuum that was filled with a bloodbath. How can we do this to our allies, to the very government we are trying to empower?

In addition, there is the matter of women. Senator Sheldon Whitehouse of Rhode Island, whom I respect, and who has had personal experience in Vietnam and Laos, has described the Taliban in a recent op-ed:

“The Taliban are a murderous, maniacal, misogynistic sect that considers women and girls to be uneducable chattel. Women are whipped for showing their faces. Taliban extremism is so barbaric that its adherents have thrown acid in the faces of little girls for the simple offense of walking to school. Women who hold office in the Afghan government—ministers, judges, executive officials—will be particular targets. Women with professional degrees will be at risk. Women-owned businesses may be up for grabs, literally. Education and jobs for women could disappear entirely if the Taliban seize absolute power. It’s not improbable; they did it before.”

So, what do we do? Declare that the plight of women and girls in Afghanistan are not our concern, not our responsibility? Or do we commit ourselves to keeping a military presence in Afghanistan forever—even when it is not a matter of national security for our country? I really don’t know.

- 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!

- Dianne Simmons has given us an update on her colleague, Sheila, whose husband, Danny, came down with COVID four months ago; it destroyed a huge amount of his lungs. Danny is doing better but is still on Hospice care. The bottom line is that he will not recover; Sheila, Danny, and their two boys are “grateful that God has given them this extra time.” Please hold this family in your prayers!

- Last Saturday, 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.
- Jim Holmes for bringing a printout of this newsletter/reflection every to Martha Hubley, who apparently reads it *several times*. Martha, accordingly, is my new very best buddy! (That's right; it doesn't take much to be my very best buddy!)

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. and wear masks. Whether we meet 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 it. I believe that the total number of cases in our state should certainly be under one thousand before we start meeting.
3. The percentage of people attending who have been fully vaccinated. I would prefer that everyone who attends be 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. However, there may be other options. One person has suggested that we ask a bakery to bake a small loaf of bread and break the loaf into in small portions, each one bagged individually at the bakery. The cups are individual, so that shouldn't be a problem.

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 an abundance supply of patience 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.

*"Come what may,
all bad fortune is to be conquered by
endurance."*

Virgil

(You are correct; this one was meant for *you!*)

A Second Quote/Thought of the Day

"When you can do nothing, what can you do?"

a Zen koan

(Think about it. This also applies to you.)

A Third Quote/Thought of the Day

"So, the thing to do when working on a motorcycle, as in any other task, is to cultivate the peace of mind which does not separate one's self from one's surroundings. When that is done successfully, then everything else follows naturally. Peace of mind produces right values. Right values produce right thoughts. Right thoughts produce right actions, and right actions produce work which will be a material reflection for others to see of the serenity at the center of it all."

Robert M. Pirsig

(Pirsig wrote the classic, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*)

(And yes, this also is meant for you. That's right—*you!*)

Worship Service Music

The Prelude for today's devotional service is the Spinney Brothers' recording of the bluegrass gospel hymn, *Better Get in that Number*. I actually prefer Jim & Jesse's recording of it, which

contains, I believe, Hoke Jenkins' clawhammer contribution on 5-string banjo, but I don't have their recording on cd. The words are: "Better get in that number that no man can number." I believe it is taken from Revelation 7:9:

After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands.

I love it when bluegrass groups create a gospel hymn out of a single passage of (not well-known by mainstream Protestants like me) scripture!

In the same vein, and with a similar theme of those who are saved, our Postlude is *Hewed Out of the Mountain*, sung by the soulful mountain singer Phyllis Boyens, who died of cancer in 2010. I absolutely love this recording! Phyllis is best known for playing Loretta Lynn's mother, Clary, in the 1980 movie *Coal Miner's Daughter*, starring Sissy Spacek and Tommy Lee Jones. Since Ms. Boyens has a bit of an accent (she is actually from West Virginia) the words to *Hewed Out of the Mountain* are as follows:

*I'm lookin' for a stone was
Hewed out of the mountain
Lookin' for a stone was
Rollin' down from Babylon
I'm lookin' for a stone was
Hewed out of the mountain
Tearin' down the kingdom of this world*

*My father's in that stone was
Hewed out the mountain
My father's in that stone was
Rollin' down from Babylon
My father's in that stone was
Hewed out the mountain
Tearin' down the kingdom of this world*

*My mother's in that stone was
Hewed out the mountain
My mother's in that stone was
Rollin' down from Babylon
My mother's in that stone was
Hewed out the mountain
Tearin' down the kingdom of this world*

*My people's in that stone was
Hewed out the mountain
My people's in that stone was
Rollin' down from Babylon
My people's in that stone was
Hewed out the mountain
Tearin' down the kingdom of this world*

*I'm lookin' for a stone was
Hewed out of the mountain
Lookin' for a stone was
Rollin' down from Babylon
I'm lookin' for a stone was
Hewed out of the mountain
Tearin' down the kingdom of this world*

*Tearin' down the kingdom of this world
Tearin' down the kingdom of this world*

This bluegrass hymn is grounded in Daniel 2:45. For those of you (like me) who need a refresher course in Old Testament prophecy, the children of Israel are in exile in Babylon. Chapter 2 of the book of Daniel begins with King Nebuchadnezzar's dream. God then reveals to the prophet Daniel the mystery of the dream and what it foretold. In this section, Daniel tells Nebuchadnezzar what he actually dreamed and then interprets the dream for him.

*And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall this kingdom be left to another people. It shall crush all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever; **just as you saw that a stone was cut from the mountain not by hands, and that it crushed the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold.** The great God has informed the king what shall be hereafter. The dream is certain, and its interpretation trustworthy.*

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.