

Dear ones,

"For this Thanksgiving season, May you be blessed in your waking and in your sleeping. May you be blessed in your travels and in your homecoming. May you be blessed when you give and when you receive, when you sit at tables of welcome and when you walk together in peace." You are all blessings to me and I am thankful for each of you. Blessings to you all.

Last Sunday we held in prayer: Jim and Lily Meyer; Pat Peterson; Amy, Lori Wright's sister who needs your prayers tomorrow as she goes into surgery; Dick Miller; Jack Hood; the people of Beirut, Paris and Mali.

For such a cold and gloomy night, the PPCM Thanksgiving service in New Harbor was well attended. Thank you to Norman and Lori and Priscilla who represented South Bristol! I am happy to see new blood and enthusiasm for the Pemaquid Peninsula Cooperative Ministry. We are going to ask the Carpenter's Boat Shop to join us going forward. I hope we can revitalize this worthwhile ministry on the peninsula.

Monday, November 30, I will be in my office at 4:00 to begin an Advent study. If you would like to participate but there is a better time for you, please let me know! The book we will study is "While We Wait" by Mary Lou Redding.

This Sunday is the first Sunday of Advent. If you or you and a friend or family would like to light one of the Advent candles with a reading (your own or I can provide one), please let me know! We have a volunteer for this first Sunday!

In January, we will begin the process of discerning whether or not to become an Open and Affirming Church. If you would like to be a part of that process, please let me know!

MESSAGE - We have flowers....

As noted in your bulletin, this morning is Reign of Christ Sunday, a time to rejoice in our King; and Thanksgiving Sunday, a time to give thanks for our many blessings—and we have plenty of reason for both. But real life frequently intrudes into the lectionary.

I was secretly grateful this past week not to be here last Sunday, not to have to address the horrors of Friday night in Paris. But then I had a phone message from someone on the weekly email list asking where my sermon was, she wanted to know what I had to say about Paris. And I realized that as your pastor, I could not skip over such devastation. So now I'm grateful that I have had a week to process my thoughts and feelings. They have swung like a pendulum this week, depending largely on the role I take on. As the mother of soldiers, I pray for peace. As a human being, I cry out for justice. As a Christian, as your pastor, I have been conflicted.

What were you doing last Friday? Jack and I drove up here to evaluate the problems over in the Parish House. In the cars we passed were often two people, a couple as we are who love each other. The passion of young love may have faded, but has been replaced by a love that grows deeper as roots intertwine.

In the back seats of some of those cars, were children paying no attention to the traffic secure in the knowledge that the grownups are taking care of things.

We passed someone walking a dog. The dog, of course, thinking that that was the best walk ever. And the human taking pleasure in caring for this furry friend.

There was someone turning into the hospital. A loved one in there is suffering. It will be a terrible time, but they will be cared for and helped and loved and they will get through.

We passed the school. Inside children were gathered, there were probably behavior problems and tears and skinned knees, but there were teachers and aides who work through all of that and help the children to grow.

We passed several churches. Restaurants where some will spend their Sunday morning. All of them, Christians, Jews, Muslims and Nones-all in peace. On the way in and out of the church or restaurant, they hold the door for each other and smile at strangers.

And all over the world it is the same. If the news reports were objective, they would say, "Around the world billions of people spent a peaceful day in cooperation and responsible action. Billions and billions of people did no harm to their neighbors. And that's the news."

But in today's world, we could not turn a blind eye to the City of Lights and the carnage. And hearts broke not only at those images, but at the surety that there would soon be more in the seemingly never ending cycle of violence.

There is a global entity who since October 1 has killed 400 people, screaming little children and kind people who had coffee that morning, thought about what they were having for dinner, and kissed someone they loved and didn't linger long enough. The goal is to bait us into fear and fighting and war. The goal is to lure the world into a bloody Armageddon, to snap shut the trap that has us all in this cycle of steal, kill and destroy.

The stories of terror and refugees have become one. And in the midst of both, we cry 'enough!' And no matter what you are yelling at your TV sets in your living rooms as you swing back and forth between the talking heads, this is where you come to find comfort and peace. To hear the answer to the question, "What would Jesus do?"

We are weary of war. But we are not weary of freedom. We are tired of terrorism. But we are not tired of courage. We are worn down with the headlines. But our strength is not worn down, our faith is not worn down, and our hope is not worn down.

There is a perfect love that casts out all fear, there's an immovable truth that we are a people of love, not fear, and there's not an attack of the enemy that can make the people of the Cross cower in fear and hate and close their doors to love.

I suspect that many of the people who loudly proclaim that we are a nation based on Judeo-Christian values are the same people who slam those doors to love.

The way we fight terrorism is to refuse to be terrified. More than anything else, Jesus tells us, 'Do not be afraid.' He tells us not to be overcome by evil, but to overcome evil with good. He knows that being held by hate is like holding a flame in your own hand and wondering why you feel burned.

In Deuteronomy, we are told to 'love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.' Jesus said, "You're familiar with the old written law, 'love your friend and hate your enemy'. I'm telling you to love your enemies. Let them bring out the best in you, not the worst." When someone gives you a hard time, respond with the energies of prayer, for then you are working out of your true selves, your God-created selves.

This is what God does. He gives his best-the sun to warm and the rain to nourish-to everyone, regardless: the good and bad, the nice and nasty. What has ever changed the world more than this: For God so loved the world, that He gave. With that ‘indescribable gift’ called Christ, God gave us a generous self and a community founded on generosity and love.

As I spoke to my soldier sons in anger and fear, with a good measure of respect for President Hollande of France and his prompt retaliation, it was my sons, the soldiers who held up their hands and said, “Whoa! What about the children, the families, the innocents in Syria?” I have often said that no one prays harder for peace than the military and their families.

And as I processed all of this through the week, it came to me that this is not the place for rational or political thought, for retaliation. This is the place for faith,” the assurance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” This is the place to bind up the world’s wounds,” to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and all nations.”

The images I will carry with me this week are not those of carnage. Unfortunately, we see too much of that these days. I will forever remember the letter from the young widowed husband, “You will not have my hatred. On Fridayevening you stole the life of an exceptional person, the love of my life, the mother of my son, but you will not have my hatred. I don’t know who you are and I don’t want to know, you are dead souls. If this God for whom you kill blindly made us in his image, every bullet in the body of my wife is a wound in his heart....Us two, my son and I, we will be stronger than every army in the world. I cannot waste any more time on you as I must go back to my son who has just woken from his sleep. He is only 17 months old, he is going to eat his snack just like every other day, then we are going to play like every other day and all his life this little boy will be happy and free. Because you will never have his hatred either.”

And I will carry with me the picture of the father holding his young son whose pleas for assurance were so simple that even I could follow his fluent French. “But Papa, they are mean. They have guns.” And his father’s gentle response, “But we have flowers.”

“Around the world today billions and billions of people lived in harmony, ate their snacks, played in the park, looked at the flowers. That is the news.” Today it is in your power to create peace. We, in community, must work to create His kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.