

Sunday we lit the memorial candle for Virgil Richards, Lori's father. Visiting hours will be 4:00 to 6:00 this Friday at the Strong-Hancock Funeral Home in Damariscotta.

We held in prayer: Jack Brennan; Charlie's friend, Bill; Gerry, Laura, Maude, the Turners. We asked travel blessings for Jane and Roger Sandler.

Next Sunday is World Communion Sunday. We will have a basket on the altar to collect food for the Food Pantry throughout the month of October.

Linda Brunner and Judy Falconer have birthdays this week!

Thank you to Cynthia Garrels for doing the snackpacking last week! If we can get enough people to participate, no one will have to do it too often. It's about an hour on Fridays from 11:30 to 12:30.

Sadly but steadily our summer members are returning to warmer climes. So I am checking to see how best to proceed with Bible/Book study. I have two suggestions. I can be there at 9:30 or 10:00 for those who prefer mornings and I can be there at 4:00 for people who prefer the later time. I would like to lead a study of the book, "Saving Jesus From the Church" by Robin Meyers. Also, I took a very worthwhile class last Saturday in leading Bible Study based on the Dickinson Series. It is a wonderful and comprehensive series. I am thinking about opening that up to the other churches on the Peninsula too. Let me know your thoughts!

HEBREW SCRIPTURE READING Esther 7:1-6, 9-10, 9:20-22-It is unusual for a book of the Bible to be named for a woman. It's even more unusual that a book from the Holy Scriptures never mentions God. The story of Esther is the background for the Jewish holiday of Purim. Esther, heeding the advice of her uncle, risked her own life to speak to the king and that is how she was able to hold this great banquet. On the second of the feast, she reveals who she is as a Jew, and what is about to happen to her people at the hands of Haman. Because of her deeds, and in remembrance of what happened, the holiday was created. Besides the sayings of Wisdom, the Wisdom Literature in the Hebrew Scriptures also records the folk stories passed down from their time in exile, how they survived as a people in a foreign land.

EPISTLE James 5:13-20 This concludes the readings from the letter of James, with a call to prayer. This letter, a continuation of Wisdom literature in the New Testament, has been mainly about living out one's faith, that 'faith without works is dead'. James has written about caring for the most vulnerable, helping those in need, and now James writes about living out one's faith through prayer. Prayer is an important work that we do, individually and collectively. Sickness was still seen, often enough, as a result of sin, so James concludes with a call for prayer for healing that is both physical as well as spiritual.

GOSPEL Mark 9:38-50-focuses on how the disciples should relate to those who are casting out demons in Jesus Name, but who are not members of the circle surrounding Jesus. Jesus advises tolerance and affirms diversity.

God, make the words we have heard a living word in the core of our being. Help us put our faith in no other power than the power of Your saving love. Make us the agents of Your love, blocking no one's entrance into the presence of Your love and grace. Through Christ, enable us to be at peace with one another and to salt the earth with the power of Your peace. Amen

MESSAGE*All My Relations*

Beth Hood

Many Aboriginal people end their prayers with the words "All My Relations". They do this to indicate that we are partners with all that God has created. God has linked us together in one community-called to liberate, nurture and anoint each other with God's love.

God is on our side! Is a clarion call of the Christian faith, but one we too often misunderstand to mean that God is our special possession or the champion of our causes. When Abraham Lincoln was asked if he thought God was on his side, he replied that it would be better for all if he was on God's side.

In Mark's Gospel, Jesus warns his disciples against believing that they control access to the power of God. Vying for power in God's name often leads to abuse of the vulnerable, the weak and the powerless. Better to choose personal loss, as Esther risked, than break the unity of the kingdom of God through our power plays.

Another reading for this morning is Psalm 124.

If it had not been God who was on our side-let Israel now say-

If it had not been God who was on our side, when our enemies attacked us,

Then they would have swallowed us up alive, when their anger was kindled against us;

Then the flood would have swept us away, the torrent would have gone over us;

Then over us would have gone the raging waters.

Blessed be the Sovereign, our God who has not given us as prey to their teeth.

We have escaped like a bird from the snare of the fowlers; the snare is broken

And we have escaped.

Our help is in the name of God, who made heaven and earth

In other words, if we rely on anything other than God, we are lost. God is on the side of the powerless, calling us to care for and to protect those who are in need. The Pope has said, "You pray for the hungry. Then you feed them. That is how prayer works."

Such is the story of Esther. Unlike many stories in the Bible like Daniel or Exodus, God's deliverance of the people in the Book of Esther is not accomplished through amazing, miraculous events but through the actions of flawed but courageous human beings who were probably never sure they were doing the right thing.

The book of Esther tells how God rescues God's people through the courage and daring of Esther, who finds herself asked to embrace the role of advocate for her powerless people—even at the risk of losing her own life.

Esther finds herself locked in a life and death struggle not of her own making. In the Book of Esther, the absence not only of God's name but of prayer and the Law is remarkable. Esther (not God) calls for fasting, in order to unite the community. Looking at the entire story closely, we know God is there. Throughout the story (which reflects, in many ways, the larger story of Israel), God provides and protects. If not on center stage, God is indeed at the center of this drama. He accomplishes a lot while 'standing in the wings, following the drama and arranging the props for a

successful resolution of the play. Esther, out of all the women, just happens to become queen. The king just happens to have insomnia on the night of Esther's first banquet. The court records read to him just happen to be the ones that tell about Mordecai saving his life. Haman just happens to come to the court when the king is contemplating how to reward Mordecai. It has been said that 'coincidence is a miracle in which God prefers to remain anonymous'. My sister, Katy, calls them God winks. Providence can be relied upon to reverse the ill-fortunes that beset individuals or the nation—provided that such leaders and their followers do their part, acting wisely and courageously.

When Mordecai sends a message to Esther, asking her to stop Haman's massacre of the Jews, Esther responds that she cannot go to the king unless summoned, on penalty of death. Mordecai's response, 'do not think that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews...Who knows? Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this.'

"Mordecai recorded these things, and sent letters to all the Jews...and as the month that had been turned for them from sorrow into gladness and from mourning into a holiday; that they should make them days of feasting and gladness, days for sending gifts of food to one another and presents to the poor" All our relations.

While we may seem far away in place and time and, to an extent, in circumstance, we share the ancient Jewish longing to be a faithful people in the midst of values and pressures foreign to who we are. How then can we, like those ancient Jews, live where we live, not withdrawing into a separate culture, and yet remain distinctly true to who we are and what we believe, true to the One to whom we belong?

What is the Stillspeaking God saying to us today, in such a time as this, through the story of Esther? This is our story too. We also trust in a God who has delivered us from death, a deliverance we recall as a resurrection people who in turn share our more than all the other Jews...Who knows? Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this."

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Next Sunday is World Communion Sunday. We, like our Hebrew ancestors in faith, will hold a day of 'feasting and gladness,' a day to break bread, share the cup, and remember God's works and God's promises through the ages. Within that same verse is a reminder to send 'gifts of food to one another and presents to the poor'" as we come to the table on that day, will we too remember those who are hungry, and make sure we share with them as our Teacher instructed us? Like Esther, are we speaking on behalf of 'all our relations' and using the power we have for their good as much as our own, no matter the cost? Do we have courage for community with 'all our relations', and not just for ourselves?

Go out and make it a great week!