

Another beautiful morning in Maine!

We held in prayer yesterday all those who were not with us.

Tuesday there will be a meeting of the Parish Pastoral Relations Committee. The purpose will be to compose a Pastoral Evaluation Survey. The members of the Committee are: Bill Glendinning, Linda Brunner, Betsy Graves and Lori Wright. If you have any suggestions or concerns, please talk to one of these people. When the responses to the survey have been received and collated, there will be a public meeting to review the results and recommendations for going forward.

Thursday at 9:30 Bible Study will meet. The lectionary for next week is: Wisdom 7:26-8:1; James 3:1-2; and Mark 8:27-38. Please feel welcome to join us!

It was in Sunday's bulletin, but I was remiss in not mentioning from the pulpit that the Celebration of Joe Field's life is next Saturday, Sept. 12 at 10:00. Please hold Mary Jane in prayer this week and fill the church with love Saturday.

HEBREW SCRIPTURE READING Proverbs 22:1-2, 8-9, 22-23-What's in a name? A name is only composed of letters that make a sound. It is the person that bears those letters who is important. No matter how many people in the world carry your name, each is different and you are the only you. Solomon wrote in Proverbs 22 some of the characteristics that I want people to see in my name: integrity, generosity, compassion. Generosity is the response to peoples' need, compassion is the reason. With Jesus' eyes we see the hurt, bleeding, dying world with new appreciation. We see the external and internal needs of humanity.

EPISTLE James 2:1-17 Some people are like two plants-one artificial and the other living. While some are genuine and alive, others only give the appearance of spiritual life. How can I know whether I have a living faith or a false faith? The second chapter of the book of James helps to answer that question. Living faith is impartial, living faith produces good works. Living faith is the result of the work of God in bringing a person to salvation. A living faith produces good things that bring praise and glory to our Lord and Savior.

GOSPEL Mark 7:24—37 These two stories are recorded by Mark and by Matthew. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first and only journey of Jesus beyond the borders of Israel, and the fact that he travelled here is symbolically significant. Jesus often stated that it was his intention to go first to the house of Israel, to those of the Jewish faith. It was never his intent to start a new religion. He was brought up a Jew and knew well his Jewish Bible. He claimed he had come not to destroy Judaism, but to fulfill it. To fill it full of new meaning. To bring it to its proper climax. To fulfill the words of the Jewish prophets. While he still desired this, he had what spaceflight engineers would call today a 'midcourse correction.' He drew his circle larger to include the Gentiles-all non-Jews- and this is nowhere more evident than this passage where a desperate Gentile

mother pleads with him to come and heal her daughter, who was possessed with an 'unclean spirit.'

MESSAGE

Theotokos

Beth Hood

Thoughts in my garden: Theotokos is another name for the Virgin Mary in the Eastern Church. It means 'god-bearer'. James tells us to be 'doers of the word.' In that sense, we are all god-bearers. The ultimate goal of the icon is to meet with the prototype, Jesus. Each of us is created in God's image. Each of us has a divine spark of divine light within our soul. In that sense, we are all icons. I had intended to tell you about this past week this morning. The Holy process and insight of creating an Icon. And I will at another time. But that is not all that happened this week. And yesterday morning, as I struggled with other events and this morning's sermon, I went out to my gardens. First I gathered flowers that echoed the colors in the Icon. Then I gratefully dropped to my knees and began pulling weeds, the best therapy I know! At one point, I looked to the clear heavens asking for help in hearing His word.

I'm going to share with you some of the thoughts that came to me as I cleaned out my garden. The first was a memory of a sermon from a couple of weeks ago. A southern minister said, "I preached that church down to four. . And I found out that revival sometimes don't mean bringing people in, but gettin' the people out who don't love Jesus." As my fingers probed among the weeds and the flowers, I was reminded too that my weeds may be God's flowers.

Perhaps to drive that point home., I was pricked viciously by a thorn. As the wound festered, I realized I was not going to tear that beautiful rose from the ground. I was going to love it, care for it and pray for it to bloom again, thorns and all.

I was told this week that I'm not inspiring, I don't link Bible readings to life today. That may be true because last week I presented three challenges. 1) To reach out to the people of our community and let them know that we would honor and be enriched by their presence. 2) To reduce the violence in our nation by promoting civility and community and 3) There is a genocide (at least one) going on in our world. What are we willing to do about it?

The response I received was that I am a poor leader. That's fair. I have been as willing to put my words out there and let them sit as you have been to listen to them and go home. So this morning, I am saying, "Follow me". Bring someone to church next week that used to come. Offer an ear or a shoulder to someone who is suffering. Greet anger with grace. I am going to begin a fund. \$25,000 will bring a Christian family out of Syria and get them

settled. There is empty home after empty home at the Brunswick Naval Base. What can be done to sponsor families and help them to a better life?

When the picture of a middle aged woman from Kentucky refighting the gay marriage fight is easier to find on social network than the picture of the grieving father lifting the lifeless body of his three year old son out of the sea, it is no wonder that our young people find no use for our houses of faith.

I don't follow the by-laws closely enough. That's fair. Laws are necessary for any organization to run efficiently and I cannot expect to help anyone if we are not organized. That is a weak spot in my religious education so far. I am grateful for those who have come to me with that concern and willing to help. But, as Jesus tempered the word of the laws of Moses with compassion, so must we. When we cannot find a way to support someone whose work for the church adds meaning to their life, when I cannot meet with a grieving daughter and offer the pulpit to someone who would give her and her family comfort and hope, the rules, the laws are separating us from the teachings of Jesus.

I should watch more TV Pastors and be more like Joel Osteen. Friends, that just isn't going to happen. I suspect that after listening to me for four months in 2013, most of you knew that. And the theology of the 'prosperity gospel' is not my theology.

We have it in us to be Christs to each other and maybe in some unimaginable way to God too-that's what we have to tell finally. We have it in us to work miracles of love and healing as well as to have them worked upon us. We have it in us to bless with Him and forgive with Him and heal with Him and once in a while maybe even to grieve with some measure of His grief at another's pain and to rejoice with some measure of His rejoicing at another's joy almost as if it were our own. That is my theology, put beautifully by Frederich Buechner. My theology continues to evolve, but I pray that it will never be measured in numbers or earthly rewards.

Blessings on you all! Enjoy this beautiful 'last day of summer'!