

Greetings members and friends of First Congregational Church of Shelburne,

Attached is the Sunday Worship Resource. Please remember we include prayer requests every week. Any requests may be sent to me at pastor01089@gmail.com

I hope to begin posting Chapel Moments on our church web page, shelburnechurch.org. Each moment includes scripture, prayer, a time for reflection and music.

This week's scripture reading from the Gospel according to John is one of my favorites. While this story tends to focus on the disciple Thomas who had serious doubts about his friend's comments about a living breathing Jesus following the crucifixion, I have always been drawn to the fear and failure part of this lesson and to the response of Jesus. I believe I am on solid ground should I suggest that everyone has experienced failure in their lives. I have every reason to believe that we have also experienced forgiveness and the peace that comes with that. Here is just one of my experiences with both of those.

On one spring Saturday morning, I was sitting in my office. A merry fire was burning away in the Franklin I was enjoying a cup of coffee while reading the morning paper. There came a knock at the door. Then the doorbell rang. I went to the door, mug in hand, and opened it. There was Mark. "*Where have you been man!*" He said, "*we're waiting for you at the cemetery.*" That is when I took it all in. Mark, dressed for church, rather than his customary farm overalls, though he did have his boots on. Mark, whose brother had died in January. Now that the ground had thawed out enough for Mark to dig a hole for the urn, today was the day when we were to commit the ashes to the ground and his brother's indomitable soul unto God. I had totally forgotten. There are a few nightmares pastors have. Most of them have to do with lack of memory: forgetting to set your clock forward in the spring and being an hour late for worship. Forgetting which child you are baptizing on a Sunday morning. Forgetting the offertory and any of the other parts of service. Forgetting where you are supposed to be. Including, but not limited to: a hospital visit, a home visit, a Deacon's meeting, a wedding consultation, calling hours, a funeral, a memorial, graveside or committal service. I was stunned into tongue tied silence when it became clear to me that I had failed. Utterly. I had failed Mark, his family, my congregation and myself. I cannot recall what I said to Mark that day. Somehow, I managed to get changed and make my way to the cemetery. I climbed the hill all the while seeing that circle of family ahead of me. I do remember how terrible I felt. When I got there, the circle parted, granting me a space into which I reluctantly stepped. *I am so sorry*, I stammered, *I cannot believe I forgot.....* whatever I was going to say next never was said, Mark's big hand grasped mine, we are so glad you are here, he said, as everyone held hands. One family, one circle, and in one voice we said, *Earth to earth, dust to dust, ashes to ashes. In the sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, Amen.*

That was not the last time I failed in the ministry. I can say I have never been late to a service since then. I would like to think that I have learned to be more like Mark when I am confronted with someone else's failure. I have every reason to believe that those disciples who failed Jesus and abandoned him felt much the same way as I did when Mark welcomed me into the circle as when Jesus appeared to them and said, *peace*.

Welcome to Sunday Worship

April 26, 2020

Good Morning to our members and friends at home,

On this seventh Sunday since we have been closed for worship, this resource is being provided for you to adapt as your wish. You will need a bible in order to read the passage for this week and we would encourage you to include other items that might enrich your experience, such as lighting candles and including music.

Prayer Requests: We are accepting requests for prayer (healing, comfort, thanksgiving and others). Please send your requests to the Pastor at pastor01089@gmail.com. Requests will then be sent out through our email list to the congregation for our common prayer life during the week. PLEASE remember that all prayer requests received become public knowledge. If you are uncertain if your request for another might be confidential, do not send it.

Chapel Moments videos: We will be posting Chapel Moments videos on our web page, shelburnechurch.org as often as possible. These are brief moments that include prayer, scripture, reflection and music.

And now let us be in worship

A Call to Worship

This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it!

Morning Prayer & Lord's Prayer

You, O God, are all we have and you are all we need. You guide us. You show us the path to life; your presence fills us with hope, joy and love. When you are near us, nothing can shake us. Your presence fills us with courage, and peace. Be with us now in our worship as we give thanks for your Christ, our risen savior and redeemer who taught us to pray together saying...

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

Prayers of the People

You may wish to add your own prayers for healing, prayers of thanksgiving, prayers for comfort and others. Silent prayer time for your own prayers and prayer requests is also included. This morning's prayer is a first person prayer and focuses on failure and forgiveness.

Let us come to God in prayer.

I do confess, O God that from time to time I make mistakes, yes, it is true. Often small ones, a couple of big ones, failures are not foreign to me. I do confess that I know what I am asked to do, but I have not reached clarity, O God, on which is more difficult: Asking for forgiveness or granting it. I seem to have no problem asking you for forgiveness, after all you are loving and merciful and forgive at the drop of a hat because Jesus paid it all. Asking you is one thing, it's in our prayers at church, *forgive us our debts*....asking someone else is different. I know how you will respond. I'm not sure about anyone else. And so, my asking goes unasked for. The reconciliation I desire, that will help make my mistakes and failures bearable, slips through my fingers. Sometimes, I cringe when I sense that the asking is denied by my desire to always be the better person. That asking for forgiveness is a weakness of character. Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I have sinned, especially when I have no strength, or courage, or desire to ask for forgiveness for what I have said or done to hurt another. I am not like you, O God, slow to anger and abiding in steadfast love. I have an abundance of unrighteous anger, and it is anything but slow. There is a part of me that silently plots and schemes how I might get back at those who I find difficult and annoying, or at the very least, find I am envious of and would love to rattle their cage, or tip them off the pedestal I have placed them on. And what if I've been hurt, and the one who is the cause has no idea? What if no one ever asks me to forgive? Should I forgive anyway? 7 times seventy you said, that's a big number of painful events. And what if I cannot forgive? What if it is too painful, too ugly, too sinful? I do not know which is more difficult, O God, only that you ask me, you encourage me, you prod me and console me into knowing my weaknesses, into pulling myself up and asking for the forgiveness I need, and others need, into doing that which my heart desires in offering forgiveness, and pushing aside the voices of petty grudges and lack of self-esteem that belittle me, and disrespect those around me. Let me see your forgiveness as a measure by which I must apply to my own way of living and let me experience in its receiving and in its giving the ever flowing streams of your peace in my life... Silent Prayer and meditation.

Gracious God, who loves us and all the rest, we know that all things are possible with you, even to bring our love and forgiveness beyond the places it is usually kept. Amen

Gospel Lesson: John 20:19-31

Each Gospel in the New Testament gives an account of Easter and the events that immediately followed. The Gospel of Matthew tells about the soldiers who went to the chief priests after discovering that Jesus' body was gone. The author of Luke relates the story of two disciples on the road to Emmaus where they meet the risen Christ. The book of Mark concludes with the ascension of Christ into heaven. The Gospel according to John relates a story that is not found in any of the others. This author gives us an intimate look into Jesus' return through the eyes of the disciple Thomas. After the readings, you may reflect on them and share your thoughts. There is a set of notes concerning these texts for your reflection.

Benediction: #181, *Alleluia! The Strife is O're*

*Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! The strife is o'er, the battle done; The victory of life is won;
The song of triumph has begun. Alleluia!*

Notes on the text

On the Thursday before the First Easter Sunday the disciples were taught a lesson about failure. "We will stay with you!" They said to Jesus, "Even though they all leave, I will stay," said Peter. But in the garden of Gethsemane, when the soldiers came to arrest Jesus, they all vanished into the night, even Peter. Peter managed to follow Jesus to the courtyard of the high priest. Once there he denies knowing Jesus. Not once. But three times. And while the text says he cried bitterly, Peter still leaves his master to his fate. On Friday, when Jesus is nailed to his cross, there are three women in attendance plus one unnamed disciple. Everyone else was hiding. We have no idea where everyone is until Sunday morning. On that morning when Peter and another disciple visit the tomb upon Mary's request, they end up leaving without seeing anything remarkable except that someone moved the stone and snatched the body. On that same Sunday, we find out by way of the gospels, that the disciples were still hiding out. They are worried, anxious and afraid. Every one of them had failed their Lord in some way. Not one of them had any opportunity to make things right and they knew it. In the aftermath of the arrest, the trial, the beatings, the nails, the abandonment, Jesus suddenly stands in the midst of these disciples. The ones who promised they would stay with him and then ran. The ones who assured him they would be by his side and then abandoned him. The ones who left him to suffer on his own, to die a cruel death, alone. One must wonder what they were thinking when Jesus suddenly appeared. What would he say to them? After what they did, or rather, failed to do what would he say? You, and I might think that Jesus would have been justified to chew them out. To let them know just how badly they had failed him and how much that hurt. Jesus had chewed any number of people out in the past, from Pharisees to money changers, even Peter got called "*Satan*" at one time. What would Jesus say to them now? The story of Jesus and his disciples, On Easter Sunday is about failure. Failure. And what makes this kind of failure so crippling is there is no opportunity to go back and make things right. This kind of failure brings with it fear. Fear of being with the one you failed. Fear of that righteous anger. Fear of what others will say about you. Fear that you will never be able to be good at anything ever again. Fear that you are now worthless, useless. A bad seed, bad apple, Fear that drives you into yourself. Failure brings fear.

When Jesus appears to his fearful disciples. To those who had failed him miserably. He comes to them and says, *Peace, Peace be to you.* When he comes to Thomas, who cannot wrap his mind, nor his heart, around the possibility that Jesus was alive, brought back from the dead, he says, *Blessed are you.* Failure brings fear. Jesus brings peace and blessing.