

A MESSAGE FROM OUR SENIOR MINISTER EMERITUS

Rev. Dennis R. Knight

Dear Friends,

A recent news feature stated that the prison population in United States has passed a new benchmark. It is currently estimated that more than one in every one hundred adults in this country is now incarcerated.

This is a dismaying and a troubling statistic. In this season of Lent, as we approach Easter, it is also sobering to realize that immediately prior to his death, Jesus was himself arrested and became a prisoner. The political structure of Jesus' day considered him a subversive and threatening figure. Furthermore, that structure went much further with Jesus than simply incarcerating him. In the end, it forcefully and decisively tried to eradicate the threat he posed by crucifying him.

We find the very notion that Jesus was a threat pure folly and a result of repressive thinking. In our contemporary view, Jesus was benevolent, but the authorities of Jesus' time no doubt perceived him exactly as we do terrorists in the modern world, and those authorities felt fully justified in responding to his threats without restraint. They would have granted him no quarter: he was the enemy, worthy only to be crushed.

Modern terminology would identify Jesus as a prisoner of conscience. Jesus' society was highly stratified. There were many outsiders and few insiders, and Jesus challenged those norms. Women, the poor, the lame and halt, the lowly, the unclean of various ilks, all stood outside society. In his every manner, Jesus confronted the kind of binding, exclusionary thinking that identified a few people as standard bearers, while categorizing everyone else as something less. He confronted these inequities in his preaching and teaching, and in the end, his advocacy for the disenfranchised led him to the cross. He set his own safety aside to serve a higher moral purpose, and was ultimately punished for his convictions.

There are many such prisoners in our society. Some are high profile persons, such as recently deceased Rosa Parks who, over half a century ago, refused to give up her seat on a bus and in that gesture impelled a seismic shift in how black people were treated. As with Jesus, Rosa Parks' act put her in a perilous personal situation, and subjected her to much public scorn. There are many other prisoners of conscience whose

names are not recorded by history, but whose willingness to confront ills around them comes at a personal price.

Moral dilemmas often present themselves as a choice between safe conformity and outspoken risk. As a community, Pakachoag Church chose to be outspoken many years ago when it launched the AIDS Support Group, and subsequent to that, elected to become an Open and Affirming congregation. In so doing, Pakachoag stepped outside the usual and conventional religious point of view by identifying with two isolated groups within our society. Pakachoag chose to embrace two groups of prisoners, one segregated by disease and the other isolated by social attitudes. In some circles, this garnered admiration. Among other people, and within some other religious bodies, our actions were signs of rampant evil in our midst.

As individuals, we are constantly presented with the challenge to stand apart from prevailing conventions and predispositions and engage ideas and concepts that may at first seem alien. The easiest way to dismiss another person who is different from us in some unsettling way is to say they are "wrong," or at best, misguided. Jesus challenged that kind of thinking, and advocated for a worldview that was encompassing of far more diversity and divergence than the restrictive and conformist mores of his time would allow.

The great festival of Easter celebrates emancipation from all those restraints, conventions and prejudices that weigh upon us, and that we invoke to imprison ourselves and others in chains of judgment and bias. The record is that Jesus, who was labeled a seditionist, was revealed as a Redeemer. So too, the ones we consign to the role of outcasts, God may see as but other children of God's affection and choosing, and that is a central message of Easter.



MONTH OF MARCH

Birthdays

3/2	Jeff LaBonte
3/12	Linnea Eldridge
3/12	Greg Kozicz
3/15	Sheri Sarkisian
3/24	Mathew Coté
3/28	Madeline Seaman

Greeters

3/2	Michelle Heron and Travis Hintlian
3/9	The Wilson family
3/16	Neile Connery
3/23	Available
3/30	Available

Coffee Hosts

3/2	Michelle Heron and Travis Hintlian
3/9	Julia Sullivan
3/16	Neile Connery
3/23	The Taylor family
3/30	Available

Daylight Savings Time

... begins **March 9**. Remember to turn your clocks ahead before retiring on Saturday night, March 8.



HOLY WEEK WORSHIP SCHEDULE

Sunday, March 16 – Palm Sunday

10:00 AM Worship Service
Maxim Korn, guest violinist



Maxim is a teacher at Pakachoag Music School. In addition to teaching violin, viola and chamber music at the school, he also teaches at Indian Hill School in Littleton and plays with the Thayer Symphony Orchestra in Leominster.

Thursday, March 20 – Maundy Thursday Service



7:00 PM Service in the Great Hall
Maxim Korn, guest violinist

We will gather in the Great Hall for a service with Communion and scripture readings.

Sunday, March 23 – Easter Sunday

10:00 AM Worship Service
11:00 AM Coffee Hour

Easter flowers

An order form will be included in the bulletins (March 9 and 16). Lilies - \$12.50; Tulips - \$10.50 or call Carolyn and she will take your order.



An Easter Egg hunt will be held during Coffee Hour.

We continue our Easter tradition again this year. Where it will be depends on Mother Nature.

Donations of wrapped candy are gratefully appreciated. Please bring candy to church by Palm Sunday

FAMILY MINISTRY ACTIVITY

Have you ever wondered how that sweet maple syrup on your morning pancakes or waffles is made? Lets go and find out!

March is sugaring time in New England. On **Sunday, March 9**, we will travel to Uxbridge (approximately 30 minutes) to the River Bend Farm Visitor Center for a tour. The tour consists of 5 segments each lasting 20-25 minutes.

- a welcome video in the 19th century barn
- indoor talk and demonstration about the art and science of sugar-making
- visit to the sampling table
- a walk to see the maple tapping and collecting process
- visit to the sugar house to see how sap is made into syrup

Food, snacks and refreshments are available for purchase or pack a lunch. Hats, gloves/mittens are highly recommended. Boots are a must! It's generally snowy or muddy out in the fields and woods where our maple trees are located.



BALANCE

by Lynn Blanchard - Chair, Spiritual Life Board

Job 32:8 “But it is the spirit in a man, the breath of the Almighty, that gives him understanding.”

Religion is a powerful force in society. It can motivate individuals to do both good and evil. Historically, it has promoted an end to slavery, racial integration, equal rights for women, and has aided in the fight for equal rights for gays and lesbians. People have created massive support services for the poor, the sick, and homeless. However it has also been used to justify wars, segregation, and hatred of those who didn't have similar beliefs. How can something based on such good, be also used to inflict harm? How do we know when we are on the right path? Is there really any one true answer for all people?

I spend a lot of time talking about my faith and beliefs, but I try also to spend as much time, if not more, listening. I have learned more about myself and my own beliefs when I've opened up and listened to people unlike me. "I can only grow when I learn, and I can only learn when I listen." Some of you have heard this saying from me before in another situation, but it is how I grow in my faith, by learning from others.

I have a challenge for you. Sit down with some of your friends, family, or maybe a church group. Now ask one question - **Who is God to you?** No one's answer will be exactly the same. Not even in a group of people who worship or live together. It's okay if you don't agree with all you hear. There is no right or wrong answer. The important thing is to listen. God made you unique, just like your beliefs. When you listen to others, ask yourself why you don't agree, or why you do. After all, how do we know our own faith is true if it's never tested?

I have a close friend whom I have learned a lot from, as far as faith. She won't call herself a Christian because of past abuses by those who used Christianity as a weapon, yet she is one of the most Christian people I have ever known. She has always been someone to turn to when you are in need, consistently giving of her heart and soul. She would stand by you

as you took your last breath, or hold your hand to keep you from falling into despair. She has opened her home and her wallet to those in need, without ever expecting anything in return. She has shown love, even when she was rejected herself, and she refused to lash out in vengeance. Should she be turned away from the gates of heaven because of a label?

If you are reading this, it's likely we share common views. You are more than likely somehow associated with the UCC. You are a Christian, and you believe in God as our higher power, and Jesus as God's son, sent to save us from our sins. But if I were to speak with you directly, I'm sure many of our basic beliefs would differ. If we were to step outside the walls of UCC and talk to other Christians, the differences would be even more evident. Step outside the walls of Christianity – well you get the point.

But what if we were to stop and change our point of view and look at the general beliefs of others? Many religions believe in a higher power, one who watches over us and guides us along the way. Whole faith systems teach tolerance and kindness to all living things. *Do on to others...* Some Buddhists, believe when you harm another living thing, you harm your own spirit. *Goodness begets goodness.* Many Native Americans believe in the "Great Spirit" or "Creator" who has given even the trees around us a story to tell. Each living thing has a part of God's master plan. *Again, God is everywhere and everything.* Some older religions feel that we are all connected by our spirit and collective energy. *We are all brothers and sisters in the eyes of God.* Are these things wrong simply because it's not what we've been taught?

"Do not accept anything by mere tradition – Do not accept anything just because it accords with your scriptures – Do not accept anything merely because it agrees with your pre-conceived notions. But when you know for yourselves these things are moral, these things are blameless, these things are praised by the wise, these things, when performed and undertaken, conduce to well-being and happiness – then do you live accordingly."

The Kalama Sutta

WOMEN'S NIGHT OUT - A GREAT SUCCESS

On Friday night, February 29, ten women gathered for a covered dish supper and a movie. The Parlor looked lovely with white linen candles and the pretty tea cups. Dinner was delicious with many different dishes (we have some great cooks!). Desserts were magnificent with a pumpkin roll cake, apple sauce cake, homemade candy and a stellar chocolate box cake with chocolate covered strawberries and whip cream. We decided to watch the movie "Snow Cake" and were all delighted with the choice. It was an evening of good food, good fellowship and pampering for our church women. Our next event will be in April. If you have an idea for a program, let Rev. Dee know.



REMEMBERING THOSE WHO SERVE

We have made cards for our service men and women and are receiving items for care packages. Please bring something for our box located in the hall by the kitchen door.



Suggested items for Military Care Packages:

Personal Care: Chap stick, deodorants, body powders, foot powder, toothbrushes, toothpaste, disposable razors, disposable shower towels, vitamins, hand and face wipes, shampoo and conditioner, feminine hygiene products, moisturizing shower gel, hair gel and dental floss.

Recreational: magazines, paperback books, jump ropes, puzzle books, dominoes, cards, DVDs, CDs. AA and D batteries, disposable cameras, ink pens and mechanical pencils.

Food items: jelly beans, Almonds, nuts, sunflower seeds, chewing gum, microwaveable popcorn, beef jerky, Pringles, Gatorade, hot cocoa mix, granola bars, and cookies in small individual packets.

Miscellaneous: writing paper and envelopes, long distance phone cards, Zip-lock bags, hand warmers and stress relief squeeze balls.

EXECUTIVE BOARD MINUTES

For anyone interested, copies of Executive Board minutes are available on the guest register stand in the Great Hall, or through the church office.

Locks and Keys

In order better to secure the building and protect equipment from potential theft and/or damage, and provide for better security, locks are being replaced. This includes all outside doors, including the Music School entrances, and some interior doors. New keys will be coded and assigned as needed. Please contact Carolyn in the office to schedule events and arrange for access to building.

Continuing Dialogue

An informal congregational meeting will take place on **Sunday, April 6** following worship and a light lunch. Items for discussion that day will include:

- Work on a mission statement
- Budget/Annual Meeting
- Our leadership structure
- Walking in the Way process
- Extending Rev. Knight's time with us



HAPPY EASTER



COME AND JOIN IN THE FUN

Pakachoag Community Music School presents its 20th **annual fundraiser** "Thanks for the Memories" – a 20-year Cabaret retrospective with music of Bernstein, Gershwin, Hart, Kern & Rodgers & Hammerstein.



Featuring local professional favorites:
Bob Gauthier, Michael Gondek, Sal Luco, Richard Monroe, Mary Anne Slack, Eric Wefald and Stanley Wilson and PCMS alumni: Gregory Paradis, Elisabeth LaBarre Gondek and Jane Shivick.

Friday, March 28 1:00 PM Matinee Show
(Boxed lunch available for \$10)

Saturday, March 29 2:00 PM Matinee Show
7:00 PM Evening Show

Advance tickets are \$20 / \$15 seniors/students. Tickets purchased at the door, or held & paid at the door are \$25. Boxed lunch is \$10 (registration only; served 45 minutes prior to show times. Table reservations available for parties of 8; must be secured 30 minutes prior to show times. Proceeds support the music school's providing scholarships, pursuing outreach and keeping tuition accessible.

Join us for fabulous music, refreshments, and fun festivities. Win great raffle and silent auction items. Check the music schools' website (www.pakmusic.org) beginning March 1st for a listing of silent auction items. Items open for bidding one hour prior to show times.