

Blessed are the Merciful, June 21, 2026, Sermon by Rev. R. Randy Day

Scripture Reading: Romans 6:1b-11 and Mathew 5:3-10

The summer solstice began at 4:24 this morning. Anybody else celebrating that? And that's not to be confused with the sunrise, which here in Mashpee was at 5:07 AM. I did see that, although I saw it in Plymouth at the same time.

So here we are. We're starting a new season of the year in the Northern Hemisphere. If you're in the Southern Hemisphere, you're starting a new season too, but it's winter. So here we are: Northern Hemisphere, the first day of summer, the longest day of the year. Right? I love it. I love it. These last several days, these last two or three weeks, it's just brighter all the time.

And it reminds us that, as I've said many times, God is the God of all the seasons of the earth, all of those seasons, and also all the seasons of our lives. Knowing you as a congregation—and anyone else who wanders in here—we all have our good days and our challenging days, our ups and our downs. I call those seasons. And God stands with us during those seasons.

I ran across a really powerful editorial by Charlotte Wright. She's now our Area Conference Minister for the UCC. I'm going to quote from her because she's writing about finding calm in the chaos. Sometimes chaos is what we have, right?

She says:

"Life has a way of sweeping us into storms. Unpredictable events, overwhelming responsibilities, and internal struggles can leave us feeling untethered."

It's like those astronauts in the movies; somebody gets cut loose and just floats away forever. Sometimes we feel like that. We're untethered. So we're really looking for some profound anchors in our lives. We want our faith to give us some anchors.

She goes on to say:

"The Bible reminds us that peace is not merely the absence of trouble, but the presence of God's comfort and guidance."

Jesus said:

"Peace I leave with you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled. Do not be afraid."

And one of the Beatitudes we have this morning is:

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God."

She goes on to say:

"Finding calm in chaos isn't about escaping life."

Sometimes people say, "I'm escaping. I'm doing this. I'm doing that." It can lead into all kinds of addictions because life becomes too hard to handle.

It's not just about waiting for silence. It's about establishing small, intentional anchors. We can reset our nervous system using simple grounding techniques and taking control of our immediate environment to restore inner balance. We seek out moments of joy and beauty and wonder in the very midst of difficult situations. That keeps us from sinking because of those challenges that hit us.

Not easy. I'm not saying this is easy.

She says:

"Whether it's a beautiful sunset, a sunrise, a heartfelt conversation"—I hear lots of those around here before the service—"a coffee hour, or a simple act of kindness, we cherish these small glimmers of brightness amidst the darkness we sometimes find in a season of our life."

Annie Dillard, in her Pulitzer Prize-winning book *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* treats her long, observant outdoor walks as active, embodied forms of prayer and contemplation. I know a lot of you—Susan and others—take lots of walks, long walks, and hikes. What more beautiful place is there to do that than on Cape Cod? Dillard's prayer walks are rooted in the idea of stalking the gaps in nature to experience the divine. Rather than reciting formal scripture, which is a fine thing to do, she considered deep, unselfconscious attention to the outdoors as a kind of ultimate prayer.

She wrote:

"I cannot cause light; the most I can do is try to put myself in the path of its beam."

Key concepts in Dillard's prayer walks include seeing, learning to hone and spread your spirit until you yourself are assailed—wedded, translucent, broadside to the merest puff of grace. Being held. Experiencing moments in the wilderness when we feel the natural world brush against us, lifting and striking our whole being like a bell. If you grew up in churches with bells, or rang those bells, you know that feeling.

And finally, quiet attentiveness—the spiritual discipline of praying without ceasing, as the Bible says, but quieting the mind. This is the discipline we are challenged with today because we are just so bombarded by information, right? We hear all of you saying it all the time. It's true of all of us.

We have all these devices. We're plugged in from morning to night, checking every text, every beep, every ring, whatever. We are bombarded. So we need a quieting of the mind.

That's what the Sabbath is all about. Back in the farming days, you worked six days, but you didn't work on Sunday. You let the livestock rest. You kept the machinery in the barn. Same concept. And we need it as much today as farmers in the past—and today—needed it.

To quiet the mind. To ponder stones and rocks. Joy collects shells and rocks and paints on them. I was thinking of her when I was reading this. Or the sunsets you photograph, and the sunrises. We are blessed to see them. Or the flowers today. Just to ponder this beauty that's in front of us. It's a wonderful, wonderful thing to do.

Now, sometimes what we read in the Bible is challenging to us. Paul's passage from Romans can be challenging.

I know one person here who joined a group and just came through, plowed through, the entire Book of Genesis. Sometimes that's hard—to understand all the ups and downs and all the challenges from God. But in

all of that, what we learn from the Old Testament and the New Testament is that God does hear us. God does hear us.

We challenge God. We can pray to God quietly. We can yell and shout at God. Sometimes we're in distress. Sometimes we're lost. God can handle all that, and God listens to us. We are never, never alone.

And God hears the voices of all people.

So what we want to do as Christians is reach out to all people, to hear the struggles of everyone else—not just those who are in our tribe, our clan, not just the people who look like us, act like us, our little group. No. It's everyone. It's everyone. Some people are kicking diversity all over the place. But the church first lifted up this whole idea of diversity because we are a rainbow of people in the world. And why is that so?

Because that's how God made us.

All shades of skin and color, all colors of eyes, all kinds of shapes of bodies, all kinds of languages, etc., etc. It's beautiful. And if you can't relate to that, I'm telling you, you're going to be shocked in heaven if you get there. You're going to be really shocked. Because the two things I know about heaven are: they're going to serve mangoes, and there's a lot of diversity. Those two things I know for sure.

I want to go there. I want to see the cloud of witnesses. I want to see my father, my grandfathers, and all the others. They're all there, right? And God and Jesus. And a lot, a lot of diversity.

So let's move now to think about our dads, but let's do it in the framework of the Beatitudes. We know the Beatitudes. Let's warm ourselves up. Let's do what they did in the old churches way back when they didn't have technology.

The pastor would line out the hymns, sometimes the scripture, so you repeat after me, okay?

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

"Blessed are they who mourn, for they shall be comforted."

"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled."

"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy."

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God."

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

You all pass. I see Martha. She's grading you. You all got an A.

All right. Anyone bring a photograph? Anybody have a story about a father? Donna will come with a mic, just like we do for Joys and Concerns. And if you could relate it to one of these Beatitudes, that's fine, but you don't have to. Was your dad a peacemaker? Are you still mourning your dad? Joy, mercy—any of those ideas.

[Congregational sharing followed.]

Sheldon:

I did bring a picture. There were very few of just my father, so this is my father and his three sons. I'm the oldest. I look about 10 in this particular picture. Anyway, my father's name is Carl. My middle name is Carl, and as I've gotten older, I've been more and more pleased to include that in signatures. But at any rate, talking about merciful. When I was a student at Bellin College in Green Bay, Wisconsin, and one winter I did a stupid thing. You probably did more, but I'm talking about one today, and that was my roommate. He was a preacher's kid. Denomination will be withheld. (actually, Methodist). At any rate, he asked to borrow my car. I said, "Sure". So he took the car, went to the library. We were off campus in an apartment, and he came back and said, "Sheldon, I had a little accident. I said, "Oh. He said, "But don't worry, no one saw me. Okay. Anyway, a week or so later, as the police were notified, because someone did see it, and the car, of course, was registered with my father's name, not mine, and the police showed up to talk to him. You know what my father said to me. You know what he said to me later on when I got home? Not a blessed thing. Nothing.

Brad:

Father's Day, I always remember mine, he was a special guy. But yesterday, when I was thinking about Father's Day, I decided to more highlight my grandfather. Sure, my grandfather came to this country, sent by the Danish Lutheran Church to establish Lutheran churches for Danish people who had immigrated to this country. So he came here, he spent time in Montreal, Canada, upstate New York, Racine, Wisconsin, and Worcester, Massachusetts, which is a connection to other parts of the family, so he was a special guy, and I remember days when he was working in Hartford. In those days, a minister couldn't live on the income from a parish or the church, he had to have his own skill, his skill was making harnesses, saddles, shoes for people, and so therefore I can remember visiting with him as a very small child, and he would lift me up. He seemed huge, who knows, but he was probably well over six feet tall, and he would lift you up and put you on one of the stuffed horses he had where the saddles were, and he would say a brief prayer to me, and we would go. Up our way, but it has always impacted my life. I wish I had known him, because unfortunately, when I was six years old, my grandmother and he were killed in her lab appeal accident, so I was denied many, many years of experiencing his love for me and his family.

David:

I'm glad to be here this morning. 50 years ago this week, my father passed away, and a great guy, he was a full-time General in the National Guard and a military man all his life. He was really proud that he opposed the Vietnam War, and he made it quite clear to the guy he grew up with in Cambridge, who went on to become the Speaker of the House -- Tip O'Neill -- who also came out against the War. Anyhow, I was just amazed how he opposed the War and was once a general. Thank you.

Paul:

My father was a strong figure for me for the 16 years that I knew him. I've thought a lot about the actions that he took; he spoke little, most of it was through his demonstrating to me what a man should be, what a father should be. The one time that he taught me about accountability and responsibility was almost the identical story that Sheldon had: my dad worked for General Electric and was responsible for a teams of GE employees stationed at different Air Force bases who maintained the jet engines on fighter planes. (He would drive up to the entrance, identify himself and the company that he worked for, and he laughed about the one time that somebody saluted him when he said General Electric.) One of those times my brother, when he got his driver's license at 16, and I was 10 at the time, went with him Edwards Air Force Base in California, and after dropped

him off at the base, he let us take the car and spend the day exploring the deserts in it. My brother learned about the accelerator very quickly. The desert back roads were not level, they just followed the contour of hills and dunes. So we were airborne, went off the road, landed on a boulder. We were safe, no seat belts, of course, at that time. Somebody came by and they helped us push the car off the boulder and onto the road. We quickly intentionally forgot that incident because the car looked fine and said nothing to Dad. Two years later, after first seeing the underside of the car while it was on a lift, he walks into my bedroom (my brother was then in the Navy) looked at me for a moment and then said "that was some rock you hit out in the desert", and then he walked out. Huge lesson on responsibility and accountability for me, lifelong, right? So, thank you for the chance to share.

Richard:

This would be a repeat if you happen to be at my house last Sunday for the bell choir and the choir cookout at my house, but a repeatable story. First, I'm going to show you a photo of my dad. He was born in 1913 in Havana, Cuba, and which is where I was born, and when the revolution occurred in Cuba 1959 he thought, okay, we'll see how this goes; we'll hang around as long as we can. Things were not going well, as you know, and he was told by his chauffeur when he was driving him to work that he was on a hit list, and he was going to be assassinated. So I think he said, "Take me to the airport." So, Father got on a plane, went to Miami for two weeks, laid low, came back, and got us, which was a big risk because he could have been killed trying to collect his family. He brought us to Miami. This is three years after my brother had died at age 12; I was born a year and a half after his death. So it was an emotional time for them, I'm sure. Thank you.

Bud:

I just want to say something about Joyce's dad, actually. He was a very interesting guy. I really liked him. He fit my groove. Both of her parents were very musical, and he played a lot of different musical instruments, particularly the violin, and one last instrument he played that he tried to get me to play -- which I never conquered -- was a musical saw, and he was good at it. I could not get it to work. One last quick story was he was a painter, and he was an easygoing guy, and he had bought some new shoes. He did a lot of climbing ladders and such new shoes, and one day he came to us, and he said, "Look at these shoes", they were too hot, so he took a drill and drilled all holes in the shoe, so they'd be air conditioned. He was a real funny guy.

Berkeley:

It's about my grandfather and my dad on the Johnson side. They were more jovial on the Mitchell side of the family, but Grandpa was head of math and Latin at Newton High School, and my dad wanted to go to Dartmouth which had a two-year Latin requirement, as all colleges did back in those days (1925). Well, his father (my grandfather) flunked him twice in Latin, so he couldn't go to Dartmouth, which was a terrible thing. He ended up in Wesleyan, where he climbed through the ranks, passed all his courses, and when he became President of the Board of Trustees 20 years later, they gave him an honorary AP.

James:

Good morning. I'm James Day, the pastor's second son, and just wanted to take a quick moment. There are not a lot of opportunities I have to speak about this man in a public setting. Happy Father's Day, sir. A lot of what people talked about are their fathers, grandfathers, most of which I assume are their natural fathers. For me, that is not the case. I was adopted as a baby by this gentleman who found me in Haiti and chose to bring me

back, so it's always meant something different to me to represent him and his last name that he chose to give me. I was a choice through and through, so to be his second son, and I think best, but more than anything, it is a unique position to understand what it means to be chosen by your father. He has fought for me each and every day, and every time I always come up winning, always come with smelling like roses, even when I'm not so deserving. So I just want to take this opportunity to say thank you, and it is an honor to bear your last name and to be currently the living representation of your legacy, just like my two other brothers who can't be here, but fellas, it's just truly amazing. And on this day, and every day, I am honored and blessed, and it is a privilege to stand here as James Pierre Day. Thank you.

Al:

Well, I guess we're getting close to the end here, but if we go back to the beginning with Sheldon, Sheldon's middle name was his father's, and my middle name is my father's, and in our family it was common to put other names in the family in the new children's names, and my grandfather's name was Alfred. So to honor my father, I was supposed to be Raymond Alfred Toll, but my mother, when she was in the hospital after she gave birth, said we can't do that to our son, and Dad said why. She said, well, his initials would be RAT. So they changed them, and my initials are ART. I thank my mother for noticing that, but in fact, my father was a peacemaker. He was also a real prankster and jokester, and this is one time when the tables were turned. We were going to visit my grandfather in Bangor Maine. Dad had a habit of before going on a large trip we'd take the take the car to the garage and have the oil changed, this was a 1950 Dodge, and make sure it would get to Maine and back, so we went to our friendly garage guy, who knew us very well. When we left Long Island, we went to Greenport to get on the ferry, and there were so many cars in the ferry, they said, "Would you get the passengers get out so they could snuggle the cars closer? So I got out of the front, and all of a sudden the alarm, the horn starts blowing like crazy in the car. I closed the door, and it stopped, and we got up and then we got to Bangor, Maine at about 11 o'clock at night, pulled into Grant's place. I opened the door, horn goes on again, and later I closed it. It stopped, so Dad took it to the to the Dodge dealership and said, "What's going on? And he calls about, "I've never seen this in my life, but you are wired up, so that if the ignition is on and you open the front passenger door, the horn will go off, and you can thank our friendly garage agent looking back at my father for a trick that he had played.

Sandy:

We are concentrating about cars and car accidents? I had a few, and I just had a wonderful father. He was just always very attentive and kind, but I had a few little bumper dents, although my sister, who came after me, had a couple really bad accidents. His response was always as long as nobody was hurt, he'd give me a hug, "as long as my little Sandy's fine", or my sister Nancy, whatever, the car didn't matter. I didn't know Paul's father nor did my father, but I know for one thing, they probably have gotten along quite well. My father adored Paul and took him on as a son when Paul and I were married, and Paul has more stories about my dad that I never even knew about. He just was a great guy,

[After the sharing:]

Great stories. I invite you to continue the conversation around the coffee hour table. These are very moving stories, my goodness. And if you have a picture you didn't get to show, you can show it at coffee hour.

Thank you all. It was very, very touching. Great fathers and grandfathers. We're all blessed.

I know many of you lost them much too early, as I did, like Paul. But we still celebrate them and the time we had with them. And when we tell these stories, we're keeping these memories alive, keeping the stories alive. It's really, really important. I think churches do that probably better than lots of other institutions.

So, you know, we did the right thing this morning. Very, very touching.