**Canaan Union Church**

**314 Main Street**

# Canaan, Maine

**December 08-14, 2013**

**Sunday School 9:30 AM**

**Sunday Morning Worship 10:15 AM**

**Pastor: Diana J. Perkins**

**Send your letters to: Canaan Union Church**

 **P. O. Box 1642**

 **Waterville, Maine 04903-1642**

**The Christmas Season has officially arrived and our house is receiving quite an assortment of catalogs, flyers and various advertisements for everything one could ever want or desire. The colored pages try to lure us to spend money at the various stores in our city. I don’t think there is anyone who loves Christmas more than my husband, Leroy, and I smile as I think of all the ways that he brings joy to our family during the holiday season in which we honor our Lord Jesus Christ’ birthday.**

**This morning I was meditating on some of the wonderful gifts we have received over the years since we have been married. The memory of them is sweet and the time and season was not limited to the month of December, but they impacted our lives and I want to share a few with you today. A few years ago, Leroy had to endure a painful back operation just prior to the holidays. He couldn’t work for several weeks following the procedure and we will never forget the wonderful friends and family who stopped by with encouraging words and those who also left money in a card at the end of their visit. It got us through some hard weeks and every act of kindness boosted our spirits. Another time, Leroy was ill and a co-worker from the Department of Labor came to visit us. She handed Leroy a “prayer shawl” and explained that the ladies guild at her church crochet these prayer shawls and they pray for those who are going through tough times or illness. Each shawl comes with thoughtful prayers and someone is designated to deliver the shawl and to let the recipient know that prayers are being sent to God on their behalf. We have had that pretty shawl in our home for many years and every time that I wrap it around my shoulders to alleviate the winter chill, I think of Sue who was concerned about our family and Leroy’s health.**

**One afternoon Leroy and I were spending time on the coast of Maine and I was disgruntled about something. I was grumbling and complaining and Leroy was listening or at least appeared to be. My voice carries and being near the water, I assume that people all around me heard my voice and the angry words. We were sitting on a blanket that we had spread out and suddenly a little dark-skinned girl, perhaps around 4 years old, came over to me and handed me a wild flower that she had just picked. I was surprised and when I looked into the child’s sweet, innocent face, she smiled very sweetly. My anger immediately dissipated like a melting snow man on a sunny day. I will never forget the wonders of that child. She looked like a little angel and my attitude immediately changed.**

**The day that I heard the surgeon say that my son needed immediate surgery on his head and that he was in serious condition, my thoughts began racing and I couldn’t think straight. My son, Will, was with me and I remember saying through tears that I had no quarters with me to make phone calls to our family members. Within minutes a lady had taken up a collection of quarters among those who were sitting in the same waiting room with us and she brought them to me and dumped them in my lap. I was amazed and grateful for each person for they all had their own medical problems to deal with, yet they reached out to help me in my time of distress.**

**I cannot tell you how blessed I am to have a prison ministry. When I read the Scripture in the past “I was in prison and you visited me”, I had no idea how to reach out to those in prison. I visited nursing homes and shut in's, and felt that I had been following what God had required. Then I was led to write and communicate with Maine State Prison and then from there, other prisons were added to our mailing lists. One prisoner asked me to send him a family picture and I have to admit, I was a bit skeptic about doing that, but sent one anyway. A few months later, I received the picture back and a pencil drawn replica that was just beautiful. How amazed I was to see such talent. Several years ago, a young man who was incarcerated at MSP, sent me a beautiful card with a rose enclosed. It was the last rose of summer**

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**and as he was working among the flowers, he thought of me. Just recently, I received an announcement that his second baby is on the way. He and his wife have built a wonderful life together and they never forget to keep me informed of the blessings that come their way. His wife’s name is Naomi and I have told her the story of Ruth and her mother-in-law, Naomi from the Bible. She has become a precious friend to me.**

**The letters that I receive, the encouragement that I get from my friends and family enrich my life. I receive hand drawn pictures on stationery, recipes, interesting news articles and miscellaneous poems, stories and interesting news about people’s lives. All of them reflect gratitude for my friendship and insight into solving life’s problems. Sometimes I get an education certificate that the inmates have earned and that makes my day. Often I hear from those who have been released and their friendship is important to me. Some of my friends have gone on to be with the Lord and some will never leave the prison, but they are all connected to me through the work of the Holy Spirit teaching and offering grace, mercy, forgiveness and peace. I have discovered that the love of God can reach even the darkest corners of a prison wall. Miracles are happening all around us and the love of God that has been extended to us is meant to be shared with people around us. The message of salvation is priceless and I want to continue to pass it on for it truly is the greatest gift that this world has ever received.**

**A photographer stopped an elderly woman as she was walking along the street of New York City He asked her what her secret to having a fulfilled life was. She told him this story that brought tears to his eyes. She said, “Several years ago, I sat by the bedside holding my dying husband’s hand. I asked him, ‘Fred, how will I ever, ever, move forward with life without you beside me. I don’t think I can make it alone.’ Fred looked into my sad grieving face said, ‘You must take the love that you have given to me all these years and share it with those around you who have no one to love them. You won’t be alone and your life will be blessed’. That is the key to having a fulfilled life.”**

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