“The Star Thrower”
II Samuel 1:1, 17-27; II Corinthians 8:7-15; Mark 5:21-43

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From the Pulpit
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A baptismal meditation delivered by The Rev. Dr. Timothy C. Ahrens, Sr. Minister, The First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, June 28, 2015, Pentecost 5, Proper 8, dedicated to Benton Myles Ahrens born Thursday June 25 as the first son of Luke and Kirs Ahrens, to Scott, Harper and Keegan on their baptismal day, to the amazing Biloxi Mission Trip team who returned early this morning, to the UCC General Synod meeting in Cleveland, Ohio, to Rev. Emily Corzine and the First Church Staff and in grateful thanksgiving for the members of First Church, last and present who have been star throwers through the generations, and to MARRIAGE especially to my wife Susan Sitler who has been by my side for thirty years of ordination and always to the glory of God!

“The Star Thrower”

_II Samuel 1:1,17-27; II Corinthians 8:7-15;
Mark 5:21-43_

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of each one of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our salvation. Amen.
He was a scientist on vacation walking the beaches of Costabel early one morning seeing what the ocean had offered the sandy shore during the night. In his book, *The Immense Journey* Loren Eiseley tells this story of what he saw early that morning. As a scientist and philosopher, Eiseley was witnessing what the ocean does to its offspring. As he walked, he said to himself, "*In the end, the sea rejects its offspring.*" How true – as he watched tiny shelled animals seeking to return to their ocean home and hundreds of starfish cast to the sand by the stormy sea.

He continued down the beach in the predawn hour and came upon many professional shellers as they gathered the beautiful, helpless starfish from the sand and stuffed them in their bags – bags filling with dying starfish. As he turned a corner around the bluff, he saw the rising sun projecting its rim of light onto the stormy sky ahead. There before him was the arc of gigantic rainbow shimmering into existence.

At the foot of the rainbow, far in the distance he caught the image of a human figure. He could hardly make it out but as he came closer he could see that the figure was going through motions which he thought to be a dance. He would stoop low to the ground picking something up, rise
gracefully, take a step toward the water and fling an object into the breaking sea. Time and time again along the water’s edge, the man repeated this motion.

As Loren came closer he saw what the man was reaching, grasping and flinging into the sea. It was the starfish. The man repeated this motion and action over and over and over again. When Loren found himself beside the man he stopped and spoke.

In Loren’s words:

I called out "Good morning! May I ask what it is that you are doing?" The young man paused, looked up, and replied "Throwing starfish into the ocean." Loren replied, "I must ask, then, why are you throwing starfish into the ocean?" To this, the young man answered, "The sun is up and the tide is going out. If I don't throw them in, they'll die."

Upon hearing this, I commented, "But, young man, do you not realize that there are miles and miles of beach and there are starfish all along every mile? You can't possibly make a difference!" At this, the young man bent down, picked up yet another starfish, and threw it over my head and far out into the sea.
As it met the water, he said, "It made a difference for that one." I nodded and walked away, leaving him there with the great rainbow ranging up the sky behind him. (found in *The Immense Journey*, Loren Eiseley, first published, 1957).

As Loren neared the bend in the coast he turned back and saw The Star Thrower casting yet another living being upon the waves. Ponderous in his walking, Loren turned completely around after losing sight of the man and returned down the beach.

Something inside of him changed. He too wanted to love the world the way this man did. He too wanted to be a Star Thrower. So he found his way back to the man’s side and there he silently joined him. As the Star Thrower looked at him Loren smiled and said, "Call me another thrower." He continued for a while until finally he returned up the beach. But changed by his encounter, Loren Eiseley was now and forever a Star Thrower – as he stooped low, lifted and flung life back to the sea each time he came upon the stars.

This story has been dancing in my consciousness since I read it 40 years ago – the first time I read *The Immense*
Journey. Then it was a story. Now it calls me deeper into another story – our story of faith.

Consider this…. Our God of the Universe spins the worlds into existence. And then one day when greed and death have grabbed hold of humanity, God sends a Star Thrower into the mix of this world. His name is Jesus from the tiny town of Nazareth in the occupied territory known as Palestine. Like the Star Thrower, Jesus stoops low and lifts up life and hope in the midst of so much death. He says, “I love the whole world. I love every creature great and small that has washed up on life’s shores.”

Wrapped in the Spirit of God, he walks the earth healing, teaching, and changing the world around him. He speaks in parables (stories) and heals with miraculous power. Everyone can understand him. Against the assault of inhumanity, he flings the starfish of this world – the rich and the poor, the orphaned, the widowed, the lonely, those who have lost their faith and those who never knew faith, the confused and conflicted – back into the sea of life.

He calls twelve to join him in his star throwing adventure. Twelve stars flung into the sea of life as he says, “Follow me and let us sow life together.” He heals the
centurion’s slave and raises to life the son of the widow of Nain. “Live!” he cries out. Two more stars are hurled into the sea. Mary Magdalene, a star cast into the sea. Nicodemus – another star flying over the surf to live. Seven demons cast out here, Joanna, Susanna and the Pharisees – one hurled into the sea of life after another. Who keeps track? Who keeps count? For the ones given life, the answer is simple – “We do!”

This single solitary Star Thrower spins stars back into the sea of life. When people challenge him and ask if it makes any difference, he simply reaches down, grabs hold of a star, throws it over the critics heads far out into the sea and responds, "It made a difference for that one." One life at a time, he changes the world around him. He changes the world around us....

Star throwers through the generations have walked the beaches of life. Some have lost their lives in the act of saving lives. They have been stricken by greed and violence; by racism, heterosexism and hate wrapped in various guises. But, some Rise and “do the right thing” to protect people and God’s sacred earth.
At Mother Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, SC, on June 17th, 9 of 15 star throwers were murdered while studying the bible in their parish hall. They were: **Cynthia Marie Graham Hurd (54)** – Bible study member and manager for the Charleston County Public Library system; **Susie Jackson (87)** – a Bible study and church choir member; **Ethel Lee Lance (70)** – the church sexton; **Depayne Middleton-Doctor (49)** – a pastor who was also employed as a school administrator and admissions coordinator at Southern Wesleyan University; **Rev. Clementa C. Pinckney (41)** – the church pastor and a South Carolina state senator; **Tywanza Sanders (26)** – a Bible study member; **Rev. Daniel Simmons (74)** – a pastor who also served at Greater Zion AME Church in Awendaw for many years. **Rev. Sharonda Coleman-Singleton (45)** – a pastor; also a speech therapist and track coach at Goose Creek High School; **Myra Thompson (59)** – a Bible study teacher.

Since the mass murder in which the gunman wrapping himself in the Confederate flag announcing he was doing this to start a race war, South Carolina and now all the states of the former Confederacy have announced they are taking
the Confederate Flag and its symbol off all government buildings. Although it comes 150 years after General Robert E. Lee laid down the colors and flag before General US Grant at Appomattox Courthouse, VA on April 9, 1865, it is never too late to become Star Throwers! I lift up and celebrate one of my favorites this past week – Dale Earnhardt, Jr. of NASCAR fame who declared the Confederate Flag is a symbol of racism and doesn’t belong anywhere but History Museums. Way to go Junior! Welcome to the Star Throwers Club!

In the deep south – along the Gulf Coast – 15 of our star throwing mission partners met and worked beside the amazing staff of Back Bay Mission in Biloxi, MS. Along with the home owner for whom we built a 59 foot wheelchair ramp so that she could welcome home her dying mother and son who is in a vegetative state, we were blessed by one Christian star thrower after another. Alice Graham, Kenney Washington, "Benji" Benzschawel, Dick, Phyllis, Ron and so many more…. All star throwers…

On Wednesday night, we met the pastor, deacons, guest singer and preacher/musician and people of New Community Missionary Baptist Church – an African-American congregation who welcomed us with open arms
into the faith community. Together we wept, sung, prayed and held on to each other as we remembered the slain of Charleston and prayed that God make us Star Throwers like them....

James Obergefell and his husband the late John Arthur rose into our collective consciousness forever as on Friday and will remain there forever as Star Throwers, too. Add to them Justice Anthony Kennedy (another Star Thrower) who led the majority of the Supreme Court in issuing a 5-4 decision declaring marriage legal for all citizens of the United States of America. As of Friday morning, June 26th, there is no longer heterosexual marriage or same-sex marriage. There is only MARRIAGE! Love Wins!

Let me read the star throwing Justice Kennedy’s poetic and loving verdict:

No union is more profound than marriage, for it embodies the highest ideals of love, fidelity, devotion, sacrifice, and family. In forming a marital union, two people become something greater than once they were. As some of the petitioners in these cases demonstrate, marriage embodies a love that may endure even past death. It would misunderstand these men and women to say they disrespect the idea of marriage. Their plea is that they do respect it, respect it so deeply that they
seek to find its fulfillment for themselves. Their hope is not to be condemned to live in loneliness, excluded from one of civilization's oldest institutions. They ask for equal dignity in the eyes of the law. The Constitution grants them that right. —Justice Anthony Kennedy, Obergefell v. Hodges majority opinion

How can I forget our Star Throwing Pope Francis I who wrote that a block-busting decision of his own entitled — *Praise Be!* for all Christianity and all humanity on our need to care for “our sister” Earth? Sounding like the little saint himself, Francis called every human being in every home, in every land, to pick up the star called creation and cast it back into the sea of life.

And did mention my favorite Star Thrower of All — Benton Myles Ahrens who was born on Thursday? He is so beautiful! His little hands are just waiting to grab hold of life and become God’s newest Star Thrower!

We have been blessed in recent weeks to witness the Star Throwers of life rising among us in courage and love. Let them guide us to be courageous and loving too. Scott —
you and Harper and Keegan will be the first wave of new Star Throwing people of God movement!

In a world where others delight in the commerce of picking up dying starfish and selling them for profit, you and I are being called down to the beach and into the surf to bend low, pick up and throw the starfish back into the sea.

In three days I head to sabbatical and to the beach, I pray that our God who spun the universe and each one of us into life, our God who gave us God’s star throwing Son will take hold of each of our lives and show us how to lift up, step out and fling into the waters of life the little ones seeking life and salvation.

I pray that our God grant us the Spirit to become Star Throwers, too. May we be unafraid as we step into the waters of life, against the current of the tides of this world and become star throwers, too? Down to the sea, under the rainbow, we will go. Each one of us is a Star Thrower – just like the one who calls us into the surf and softly and tenderly says, “Live.” Amen.

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