

First Congregational Church Weekly Newsletter

East Longmeadow, MA

October 14, 2026



PASTORAL MEDITATION by Rev. Thomas Hawkins

DOUBLE – EXPOSURE

Carefully packed in tissue and stored in a small box is an ambrotype of my maternal great-great grandfather. It was taken of him during the Civil War. He is wearing his uniform and his right arm is resting, Napoleon-like, inside his buttoned tunic. I inherited through my Grandmother Wiseman who cherished this photo and sometimes pulled it from its small box to show it to me and tell me stories about her father and great-grandfather.

It was taken in 1861 or perhaps 1862 before Alfred was wounded at Antietam, captured and spent the rest of the Civil War in a prison camp. In the early 1860s, photography was in its infancy. Imagine what it must have felt like to have a family member's image captured not on canvas with paint and brush but on a piece of light-sensitive material that rendered the image flawlessly. It must have seemed not just rare but magical, especially to have a picture of your son or spouse who has gone off to war.

Over 150 years later, we now take about 2 trillion photos every year. That averages to nearly 5 billion photos every day worldwide. Almost all are taken with our smartphones, which is also where they are typically stored. One source I consulted said most of us have on average 2,700 photos stored on the phones we carry in our pockets or purses. The same source reported that worldwide people take about 92 million selfies every day. Yes. That's every day. Next to selfies, photos of our pets represent the second most popular photo we store on our smartphones.

The daguerreotype is a direct positive image fixed on a sensitized silver-coated metal plate in a camera obscura. Because of its highly polished surface, it could resemble a polished mirror and was sometimes popularly described as "a mirror with a memory." When someone looked into a daguerreotype, their own living face was superimposed over the face captured on the original, silver-coated surface. A daguerreotype thus can create a kind of "double exposure" where two different eras and faces meet on a single surface, forcing a fusion of past and present as we gaze into the photograph. The image on the photo's surface merges into the mirrored image of the person looking into the photo. This phenomenon is used by the German poet Rainer Maria Rilke in his poem "Portrait of my Father as a Young Man" in which he sees his face superimposed on his father's as he looks at daguerreotype of his father in his imperial Austrian military uniform.

I think our relationship with the bible is more like a daguerreotype than a digital photo. Those digital photos on our smartphones rest in immensely large galleries of selfies and pet photos until, exasperated by our inability to locate a particular photo, we simply delete them all. We can approach the bible in this same way. We read the bible and remember a story, a memorable phrase or sentence, or a vivid parable that we tuck away in our mental gallery only to be lost among all those selfies and pet photos. Consequently, we don't experience a kind of overlapping "double-exposure" in which we don't see our life stories in the bible's story of God's encounters with humankind. We don't find our story in the distant mirror of God's story. As Paul puts it in 1 Corinthians 13, we look into the mirror and see only dark shadows.

What if we read the bible more like we were looking into a daguerreotype? The bible does not want us to relate to it like we typically relate to those 2,700 digital images we snap, store on our smartphones, and never search for again.

One traditional way of reading and meditation on scripture invites us to practice a daguerreotype-like method of looking at scripture and seeing ourselves in it. A kind of "double-exposure" of ourselves within the scripture and the scripture within us. In brief, it works like this:

- Pick a short incident in Jesus' life or a parable he tells. Nothing long, just the short passage. Read it once, close your eyes, take a few deep breaths and ask yourself – "If I were a participant in this story, what would I be seeing? Make the scene as vivid as you can as you imagine it.
- Now read the same verses a second time and ask yourself – "If I were a participant in this scene, what would I hear?" "What smells would be around me?" Make the scene as real as possible, as if you were right there in the story with Jesus.
- Then read the same passage a third time and ask yourself – "If I were in this story what would I be feeling?"
- Next read it a fourth time and ask yourself – "Where does this story intersect with my personal story right now? If Jesus were with me now or I with him then what would Jesus be saying to me?" What would he ask you to do next if he were speaking to you directly out of this scene or passage. And in your imagination, let Jesus or other characters in the scene you've created speak to you.
- Finally, close with a brief prayer that gathers your experience and insights together.

Try it and let me know about your experiences with it.

With prayer,
Pastor Thomas

SUNDAY WORSHIP in the sanctuary or livestream link: <http://www.facebook.com/churchontherotary/>

PASTRIES WITH THE PASTOR will be Wednesday, October 28, 10:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.

You are invited to informal conversation with Pastor Thomas over coffee or tea and pastries on Wednesday, October 28. This is an opportunity for spontaneous conversations with Pastor Thomas and each other around whatever questions or topics you bring to the table. Please join us in Butler Hall!

EVERGREENS & PINE BRANCHES

It's that time of year again when I will be making cemetery logs for the **CRAFT FAIR**. I really, really need some branches of evergreens from your yard or woods. Think of friends with evergreen trees that would share a few clippings with us. We are looking for any kind of evergreen. Examples – spruce, pine, yew, arborvitae, juniper, etc. These cemetery logs are very popular. We usually sell out before noon! Please bring these greens to the church by October 21st. You can leave them near the back door of the apartment building. If you have any questions, please call the office. Thank you!

IT'S TIME! CRAFT FAIR donation time!

- Please look through your gently used novels to donate for that area.
- Please look through your costume jewelry with an eye to donating pieces for another to enjoy.
- Please check those house plants to see if they might be divided. Do you have extra gently used/nearly new indoor/outdoor plant related items (pretty pots, gently used hand tools)? How about garden or plant books?
- Please consider baking for our bake sale room. Package these items in an attractive, easy to transport way. It also is very helpful to label what you've made. Pretty food sells quickly!

YOU HAVE ALREADY NOTICED...IT'S GETTING COLD

As you are once again able to take out your heavier winter clothes, remember that you have neighbors who have nothing to keep them warm. The First Congregational Church on the rotary will once again be collecting **gently used, clean, warm clothing** until **NOVEMBER 22** for men, women and children (even infants and toddlers). NOW we will also collect **CLEAN**, warm blankets. Everything will be donated to the critical work of the Springfield Rescue Mission serving your neighbors in the greater Springfield area.

Please place your donations in the box in the breezeway, or the big, blue bin outside. We accept warm clothing: coats, sweaters, vests, sweatshirts, hats, scarves, gloves, mittens, boots, etc. We also ask for **NEW** socks and underwear. Thank you for caring and taking the time to go through your closets. Your continued generosity will warm the lives of our neighbors in need during the coming cold winter months.

Mission & Outreach

PRAYER

God who brings forth green shoots and sends the frost: We praise you for the changing seasons and especially now for the beauty of autumn leaves. As the earth around us prepares to rest from its seasons of growth and harvest, teach us to rest in you amid our busy lives. May the certainty of changing seasons inspire confidence in us of your unfailing constancy and mercy. Amen.



FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

7 Somers Road, East Longmeadow, MA 01028

Web: churchontherotary.org ~ email: office@churchontherotary.org ~ 413.525.4121