



The Rolling Stone

Rollstone Congregational Church

November 2019

Pastoral Greetings!

It is almost impossible to believe that Thanksgiving Day is only a few weeks away when we have the time to pause and offer thanks to God for all the blessings that we have received. The day will quickly be upon us and then we will be into the advent and Christmas seasons. Many of us unfortunately will miss Thanksgiving Day altogether because of the rush to Christmas. I remember not that long ago that besides spending time with the family, there was time put aside to serve Thanksgiving dinner to the poor, homeless, and lonely. That was really an opportunity to mingle with others and helped me to be appreciative of all of God's blessings.

Now I quickly do a fast forward and realize that Thanksgiving is being shortchanged of having any true meaning because we are losing sight of what Advent and Christmas seasons were intended to mean. I am sharing an article that I recently read and found it to be so enlightening that I believe in that sharing it with each of you will deepen your appreciation of Thanksgiving, Advent, and Christmas. The article is entitled "Have Yourself a Medieval Advent!" by Bob Kaylor.

"Planning for Advent is one of the most difficult tasks for the preacher, particularly for those of us who have preached a lot of Advents over the years. It's that time of year when your local big box store has been stocking Christmas items since late September, when Christmas carols play 24-7 on certain radio stations, and when shopping ramps up to a frenetic pace. People in church clamor for Christmas carols during Advent services. That bouncy song "We Need a Little Christmas Right This Very Minute," seems less a hope and more of a command during the weeks leading up to the Big Day.

But it wasn't always this way. In fact, as early as the fourth century, the church engaged in a period of fasting and penitence in December that had no correlation with Christmas. It was only in the seventh century that the connection was made. Like Lent leading up to Easter, Advent was a period of fasting, penitence and preparation, and by the medieval period it was firmly established.

But the medieval clergy understood Advent differently than we do. While we see Advent as preparation for celebrating the first coming of Jesus, the medieval church saw it as preparation for Christ's second coming — to engage in fasting and penitence in anticipation that the one who came in the manger would be coming again in glory to judge the living and the dead. Advent was an eschatological focus on the "last things" and that played itself out in practice.

Take the Advent candles, for example. They have represented a lot of different things over the centuries. Most years for us and for most Protestants they have represented Hope, Peace, Joy and Love, wonderful themes anticipating Christmas. But in the medieval church, the meanings were quite different: The candles represented death, judgment, heaven and hell. The Scripture readings for Advent were only

secondarily oriented toward the birth of Jesus. Instead, the primary emphasis was on the coming “day of the Lord.”

In other words, Advent wasn't so much about getting quickly to the light of Christmas, but about acknowledging the darkness that appears before the dawn. Advent was a season for realism, not Christmas dreams and shopping. In fact, in the medieval age, the Christmas season began with Christmas Day and extended 12 days (the 12 days of Christmas). That's when you went shopping for pipers piping, maids a-milking and a partridge in a pear tree!

Advent, in other words, was a season acknowledging that we live between two ages — the present age and the age to come. It is the midnight of the Christian year; a time to be thinking about last things.

No one can help us understand this better than John the Baptist. Throughout church history, he has been the central figure of Advent. He is the herald of the age to come; not just the coming of Jesus in his immediate present but also the arrival of the kingdom of God in its fullness in the last days. He is the herald whom the prophet Malachi anticipated, “the prophet Elijah” whom God would send before “the great and dreadful day of the Lord comes” (Malachi 4:5). It's interesting that in the original order of the Hebrew Bible, Malachi does not appear last in the canon, but he does in the Christian canon of the Old Testament. It's a clear sign pointing to the ministry of John the Baptist, who opens the New Testament narrative.

As a throwback to the Old Testament prophets, John is out of step with our time. He makes us feel uncomfortable in a season when we want to focus on the comfort of family, decorations, traditions and even comfort food. And yet we need him to speak to us before we get to Christmas. It's no coincidence that every one of the gospel writers begins their narrative with John the Baptist. All of them agree that without him, there is no good news, no gospel of Jesus Christ. Without John, we will become so much like the rest of the world which celebrates Christmas without having any idea what it all actually means. We'll put up our decorations and pretend for a few weeks that everything is great and that all we need is a little retail therapy to make ourselves feel better.

With John, however, we will deal with reality — that there is darkness in the world and in us, and that the only way out of that darkness is through the light of Christ that is about to dawn. John pokes at us like a good prophet, calling us to repentance, to return to God, to examine our hearts and to prepare for Christ's coming.

Last Advent I decided to go all medieval and changed our candle liturgy to match those medieval themes of death, judgment, heaven and hell. It was a bit of shock to the system for a lot of my people, but it was a good one. The light of Christmas burns a lot more brightly when we acknowledge the darkness.

This year's Advent gospel readings from Matthew take us into those themes about the coming day of the Lord and the prophetic ministry of John the Baptist. Don't skip over them in favor of another bouncy pre-Christmas theme. Give the church a little Advent, right this very minute, and help them prepare for the coming of the Lord!”

Looking forward to putting and God and Christ back into the special times and seasons that will soon be upon us.

Pastor Dave

Church School November News

September and October brought back many of our lively youth!
It is great to be back! We plan to "walk together" through the Walk Series. Here is a peek...

"Walk Series"

1 Walk in Wisdom –

Learn the difference between earthly and spiritual wisdom.

Learn to choose wise decisions that reflect our relationships to Jesus Christ.

2 Walk in Truth –

Explains how truth is not personal opinion, but found in the Word of God.

The bible helps us recognize the truth from lies.

3 Walk in Love –

Show how God's love helps us truly love others well.

He answered, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" Luke 10:27

4 Walk in Faith

If you have faith as small as a mustard seed nothing will be impossible.
For we live by faith, not by sight.

Beth & Hal



Missionary Ladies Report

In early October, Edwina Olcott, Marilyn Wales, Ellen Porell and I met at the Church to go through our boxes of yarn and materials. We were able to fill a few bags for our Montachusett Chorale Project.

Now that we are all back home after the summer, we will be meeting again. We are all working at home to have boxes ready to deliver before the holidays.

Becky Capone-Colwell

Deacon Report

Hi everyone. I can't believe November is just around the corner.

On Oct we had a thank you celebration for Katharine Dodd. She has been our organist for over twenty years. She is now retiring. At the worship service some of her favorite hymns were played. She received gifts from the choir, the congregation, and the church.

In Cookman Hall after the service an English tea was served. The Deacons, Pastor Dave and Don, and some of the congregation prepared and served all the food. They did a wonderful job. Everything was delicious. The hall was decorated with white tablecloths and flowers on the tables.

Katharine is a marvelous organist. She will be missed by everyone.

In November we will be having a dedication of our new sound system in memory of Walter and Norma Schrader. Diane, Lois, and Jon Schrader have generously donated money for this in memory of their parents. In later years both Walter and Norma were hard of hearing. The sound system really needed to be improved. We are very grateful for this gift.

We will soon be getting ready for the holiday season and celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ. Look for announcements coming soon.

Mary Anne Smith is still sending cards to the ill, or anyone else who needs a little cheering up. Please let her know if anyone needs to know we are thinking of them.

Until next time, Linda Haas

WAYSIDE PULPIT

Giving Up – in Glorious Color

People from all over the world come to the US northeast in the fall, to watch the shades of green of our woods change to a riot of gold, bronze, orange and scarlet. Where have these colors been all summer? The colors, or rather the chemicals that make them appear, have been there all along. They have been hidden by the green of chlorophyll.

Chlorophyll is the essential chemical produced by the plant to conduct the process of turning sunlight into the energy needed for growth. In the autumn, the hours of daylight shorten, and the sun rises less high in the sky with each passing day. At some point, the energy economy of a tree changes. It becomes ineffective to continue producing chlorophyll for energy collection. The leaf is allowed to wither, revealing the color chemicals which have been there all along.

At my stage in life, the economy of energy production seems to be changing. The list of things I used to do with ease, and can do no longer, seems to be increasing with each passing day. But as the days shorten, and the sun rises less high in the sky, may the colors which have been there all along shine brightly to the glory of God.

Chuck Funk

A Family Wedding

Jay and I traveled to Wisconsin several weeks ago for the wedding of his niece, Monica. She is a lovely girl – well, a middle-aged woman now. In her youth, she was deemed a “slow learner” and struggled in school, but she graduated with her class. She went to work in her family’s small business and has been a source of comfort and delight to her family all her life.

When she was in her late 20s, she joined a church group, the St. Dysmas Society, which ministers to individuals in prison. According to lore, St. Dysmas, or the “Good Thief”, was one of two men crucified with Jesus on Mt. Golgotha. He asked for Jesus’ forgiveness and Jesus said: “This day you will be with me in paradise.”

As a member of the church group Monica began writing to Nick, a young man about her age, who had just been imprisoned for a crime that no one wants to talk about. His crime is one that puts him on a special list for all his life. His name is on a website so that others know to shun him. He is among the unforgiven.

Years passed and the letters turned to visits and the visits to love. Monica’s family watched this with growing concern. One day, Monica came home with a tiny diamond ring. She and Nick planned to be married when he got out of prison. It was then that Monica’s father, Richard, began to visit Nick – sometimes with Monica and sometimes with the Catholic priest who had been ministering to them both. He learned that Nick’s mother was dead and his father was an alcoholic who had a sex change. “The most unattractive woman I ever met,” Richard said. He also saw that Monica, now approaching her 40s, was old enough to make her own decisions. Then, last year, after 15 years in prison, Nick was released.

The formal church celebration was a curious affair. Although one of Monica’s two brothers declined to attend and no one brought their children, more than 30 of her family and friends participated in the Catholic mass. Nick’s father/mother was escorted up the aisle by Nick’s former cellmate. The older man sobbed during much of the ceremony and then slunk away before the Mass ended. The 20 or so of Nick’s aunts, uncles and cousins who attended seemed filled with joy and a kind of relief.

As for Nick, standing at the altar, beside the priest who clearly believed in him, he began to cry when he saw Monica coming down the aisle on the arm of her father. Monica too began to cry and so did Richard. Later at the wedding dinner-dance, I spoke with Nick for the first time. We talked about redemption and grace. He was clearly very invested in his new religion, Catholicism. He told me that he was “unbelievably fortunate to have Monica’s love and to be accepted into this wonderful family.” He also said that he would “protect and care for Monica with everything I have.”

I believed him. I pray that I am right.

-Eileen Berger





