



Rollstone Congregational Church

United Church of Christ

199 Main Street, Fitchburg, MA

Pastor: Rev. David B. Hanks 978-821-9571

Moderator: Paul Stansel 978-337-1608

Church Organist and Musician: Gavin Klein

Pentacost Sunday

May 31, 2020

Prelude:

“Praeladium No. 9”

Heinrich Scheidmann

Gathering Thoughts:

Dear Brothers and Sisters after serious reflection and prayer the church leadership has made a decision regarding the timetable for re-opening of the church to public gathering for worship and other activities. We have decided that September 1st would be more prudent and advisable at this time, however we will continue to monitor the situation and conditions in the Commonwealth. We are meeting with virtual meetings to constantly review the situation and will send out updates to keep each of you informed. Through this pandemic we have grown because a new door was opened in how we can minister to the congregation and community. We hope that you are taking care of each other while practicing the necessary protocols to keep each of us safe and healthy.

Please send in your prayer requests so that they may be added to the prayer list of Joys and Concerns.

Let Us Rejoice as We Worship:

God of wind and fire, when you send your Spirit, we are created anew.

God of mighty oceans and still waters, when we receive your baptism, we are born anew.

God of bread and wine, when we eat at your table, we are nourished anew.

So pour out your Spirit. Let sacred waters flow.

Fill us with holy food. May our hearts and our hands be open wide to receive your gifts of life. Amen.

Opening Hymn: “On Pentecost They Gathered” Jane Parker Huber

On Pentecost they gathered quite early in the day,
a band of Christ’s disciples to worship, sing, and pray.
A mighty wind came blowing, filled all the swirling air,
and tongues of fire a-glowing inspired each person there.

The people all around them were startled and amazed
to understand their language, as God in Christ they praised.
What universal message, what great good news was here?
That Christ once dead, is risen to vanquish all our fear.

God pours the Holy Spirit on all who would believe,
on women, men, and children who would God's grace receive.
That Spirit knows no limit, bestowing life and power.
The church, formed and reforming, responds in every hour.

O Spirit, sent from heaven on that day long ago,
rekindle faith among us in all life's ebb and flow.
O give us hearts to listen and tongues aflame with praise,
so folk of every nation glad songs of joy shall raise.

A Time of Prayer:

God of power and might: Your Spirit was there on creation's first day, hovering over the deep. Your Spirit was there for Moses as fire on the mountaintop. Your Spirit was present with your great prophets, nerving and sustaining them. Your Spirit acknowledged Jesus of Nazareth as your Son, with whom you were well pleased. And your Spirit was there in the thunderous gale on the day of Pentecost, but instead of deafening the people, it refined their hearing, so that each could hear the gospel in his own language.

May the miracle of Pentecost happen again this day throughout your Son's ecumenical church and in this local congregation: that long-standing grudges may be buried, misunderstandings clarified, barriers removed. And may this service of worship express our resolve to be more serious in our quest of unity both with fellow Christians and with all your children. We pray in the name of him in whom there is no east or west, no south or north, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

A Reading from the Scriptures:

John 20:19-23 (NIV)

19 When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' 20 After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21 Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' 22 When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.'

Hymn of Preparation: "Let Every Christian Pray" Fred Pratt Green

Let every Christian pray, this day, and every day,
Come, Holy Spirit, come!
Was not the Church we love, commissioned from above?
Come, Holy Spirit, come!

The Spirit brought to birth, the Church of Christ on earth
To seek and save the lost:
God never has withdrawn, since that tremendous dawn,
The gifts of Pentecost.

Only the Spirit's power, can fit us for this hour:
Come, Holy Spirit Come!
Instruct, inspire, unite; and make us see the light:
Come Holy Spirit, come!

The Message: The Second Act

The great novelist F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote that “there are no second acts in American lives.” But Fitzgerald was wrong. There are plenty of them.

Take Ken, for example. Growing up, all he ever wanted to be was a doctor.

He did pre-med at Duke University, and then went to medical school at the University of North Carolina. After completing his residency in New Orleans, he moved to Los Angeles and practiced medicine for Kaiser Permanente.

Along the way, he got bit by the acting bug. He started doing standup comedy and began to audition for acting parts. This was a surprise to everyone, he says, since “I never even did theater in high school.”

He got his break in a series of movies, and then starred in a sit-com called Dr. Ken. His name is Ken Jeong, and he is now a full-time comedian and actor.

Entertainment was his second act.

But still, Dr. Ken renews his medical license every year, and occasionally has to use it. He once jumped offstage during a standup routine to help a woman in the audience having a seizure. “You just can’t take the doctor out of you,” he admits.

Another example comes from American history. Teddy Roosevelt was a big star in the New York legislature, having a wildly successful first act in his life and career. Then he lost his wife and his mother on the same day when he was 25 years old. He was devastated.

According to historian Doris Kearns Goodwin, “he went to the Badlands to escape his depression by riding his horse 15 hours a day.” In time, he felt ready to work again and decided to take whatever job came his way.

He started working as head of the U.S. Civil Service Commission.

Then, New York City police commissioner.

Next, he joined the U.S. Army, where his leadership qualities developed.

He became New York governor.

Then vice president of the United States.

And finally, he was elected president, and his image was later chiseled into the cliffs of Mount Rushmore.

No second acts? Ridiculous. Teddy Roosevelt had second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh acts.

“It was a winding path to leadership,” says Goodwin to Fast Company magazine (September 2018), “and it made him better because he had all these different horizontal experiences.” He would not have become an excellent president unless he had a number of different jobs, some of which were horizontal but still extremely valuable.

Of course, second acts are nothing new. In the garden of Eden, Eve asked God to tell her what Adam was doing behind a bush.

God’s answer: Turning over a new leaf.

On Easter evening, the disciples were traumatized. Yes, they had heard Mary tell them, “I have seen the Lord” (John v. 18), but they had not spotted the risen Jesus with their own eyes. With the trial and crucifixion of Jesus fresh in their minds, they were probably suffering from serious PTSD.

They were also scared. John tells us that “the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews” (v. 19). After Jesus was killed in such brutal fashion, no one knew what kind of violence might come their way. Their first act as disciples was over, and their second act did not look promising.

Then Jesus came and said, “Peace be with you” (v. 19). He passed through locked doors and was suddenly standing in their midst. Then he showed them the marks on his hands and side, demonstrating that it was truly him.

For the disciples, this was the beginning of their second act. Grief was suddenly replaced by joy; despair was quickly transformed into hope. Jesus had promised them that their “pain will turn into joy” (16:20), and his appearance proved that this promise was coming true. Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you” (v. 21). Before they could completely process the good news of the resurrection, Jesus sent them on a mission.

(Action.) Notice what happens at the beginning of a second act: Action. Ken Jeong did not quit medicine to sit by a pool in L.A. Teddy Roosevelt did not hang out in the Badlands forever. No, they both jumped into action, pursuing new passions. They both took a leap of faith, fully aware that comedy offered less job security than medicine, and that working for the Civil Service Commission was no clear path to success.

Jesus ordered his disciples to jump, even while they were cowering behind locked doors. “I send you,” he said, right before pushing them back into the world.

Second acts can be uncertain. Second acts can be scary. The skills that come from “horizontal experiences,” as Doris Kearns Goodwin would say, are valuable. But they are no guarantee of success.

Still, Jesus calls his followers to act.

(Power.) After saying that he would send them out, Jesus breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit” (v. 22). Jesus did not want his disciples to begin their second act without power. He knew that it would be unfair of him to push them into action without giving them the gifts they

needed to be effective. And so he breathed on them and filled them with the Holy Spirit. He inspired them on Easter Day with the very same Holy Spirit that would descend on the apostles in the rush of a mighty wind on the day of Pentecost.

Notice the echoes of Scripture in this verse. When Jesus breathed on the disciples, they were reminded that God breathed life into Adam in Genesis (2:7). This breathing also recalled the book of Ezekiel, in which God said, “breathe upon these slain, that they may live” (37:9). “Jesus’ breathing the Holy Spirit on his disciples thus is described as a new, second creation,” writes preaching professor Gail O’Day. “Those who believe in Jesus receive new life as children of God.”

Second act. Second creation. New life. New inspiration. That’s the power that the risen Jesus breathed into his followers.

(Forgive.) Jesus also empowered his disciples to forgive. “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them,” said Jesus (v. 23). In this verse, Jesus was empowering his followers to continue his mission in the world. Since the work of Jesus was all about the work of forgiveness and helping people to be right with God, then the work of his followers should be all about forgiveness and helping people to be right with God.

But what about the phrase, “If you retain the sins of any, they are retained” (v. 23)? What does that mean? Hard to say. One possibility might be that you can offer people forgiveness, but you cannot force them to accept it. If they reject forgiveness, then they continue to deal with the consequences of their sins, and they struggle to be right with God.

In any case, the disciples have now entered their second act, one that involved action, power and forgiveness. The risen Jesus sent them on a mission, filled them with the power of the Holy Spirit, and gave them the ability to forgive sins and help people become right with God.

The very same is true for us. Whether medical doctors contemplating comedy or elected officials struggling with grief, our first act is not our last act. Through the coming of Jesus, we are being called into action, filled with the Spirit and being given the power to forgive people and restore them to right relationships.

When Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove was a student at Eastern College, he was trying to figure out what it meant to be a disciple of Jesus. He met over breakfast every two weeks with the president of the college, a man named David Black. Jonathan was impressed by this, since it was unusual for presidents to meet regularly with individual undergraduates. Whenever they would get together, the president would remind Jonathan that Jesus was a person of “no reputation” (Philippians 2:7, KJV).

Jonathan thought a great deal about this, because he knew that we live in a world that is obsessed with people and their reputations. Competition is constant, and people are always trying to get ahead — in their educations, their careers and their personal lives. Parents even compete with one another through their children. The first act of life seems to be focused on

establishing a reputation and getting ahead of the competition.

But perhaps Jesus is calling us into a second act, one that includes a different kind of action and helps us get right with God. Perhaps this second act can be powered by the Holy Spirit and focused on service to others. Jonathan caught a glimpse of this possibility while he was still a student.

One summer in college, he writes, “I volunteered to help students into the dorms. Lugging boxes up the stairs for the 50th time, I bumped into a middle-aged man in shorts and a dirty T-shirt. He was breathing heavily and let out a grunt. I peered over my boxes to apologize and saw the man’s face. It was [President] David Black.

“When I wonder what it means to be a man of no reputation, the image that comes to mind is my college president carrying boxes in a soaked T-shirt, meeting new students as their servant before he was introduced to them as their president.”

Wherever we are in life, we can have a second act. We can follow Jesus in a life that is filled with the Holy Spirit and focused on action, power, forgiveness and service.

Musical Interlude: “Veni Creator Spiritus” Thomas Anderson

A Time of Prayer – *let us remember all of our brothers and sisters on the prayer list, especially those who are having a difficult time during this period of social distancing. Please share your prayer concerns so that they may be added to the prayer list by emailing your concern to Pastor Dave at dbhanks92@comcast.net or by calling him direct at 978-821-9571. He is available every evening and on weekends. During this time we suggest that you create a prayer partner with whom you can pair up until we are able to worship together at the church.*

PRAYER LIST

**Amy Belli
Carolyn Barney
Jack Brigham
Becky Colwell
Cathy Fontaine
Chuck Funk
Bob and Pat Goguen
Linda Hurd
Tom Kazanjian
Sarah Kee
Bob and Doris Lane
Diane Lane Cormier
Linda Long**

Lorraine Michaud

Cathie Perra

Maria Piazza

Melanie Pouliot

Martha Quinn

Del Sampson

Elwin Shepard

Ron Smith

Carole Ann Sumner and Henry

Donna Thorne

Marilyn Wales

Family of Patty Westerman

All who are experiencing difficult times and situations

All who are lonely or depressed

All who are personally dealing with the affects of the COVID-19 Virus

All medical personnel – doctors, nurses, testing staff, first responders

**Those whose livelihoods have been impacted through lost jobs
or reduced financial stability**

Our Church and all of its members

Almighty God, Creator, Father of our Lord Jesus: We glorify you today for the gift and power of your Spirit. We recall with awe how your Spirit brooded over the primeval chaos, how carefully you fashioned the world with all its wonders out of that chaos, how lovingly you imprinted us with your own image.

We praise you for the spectacular outpouring of your Spirit at the first Pentecost and for the launching of your Son's church in power and miraculous unity. We magnify your holy name for numberless, unspectacular Pentecosts in the life of the church through the centuries, and in the lives of Christian men and women who felt a surge of power when they needed it most for witness: in prison or in the arena, before a scoffing crowd or a lynch mob.

We thank you, righteous God, for your Spirit's might in convicting us of sin again and again, when we become smug, self-righteous, lazy, callous, holier-than-thou. We praise you for your Spirit's skill in reminding us that self-interest often underlies our seemingly finest deeds. We give you thanks for the mirror of your Spirit, in which we see ourselves not as others see us but, far more disturbingly, as you see us.

We glorify you, merciful God, for your Spirit's ministry of comfort. We pray that friends and loved ones of whose present illness or other need we know, as well as others of whose needs we may be unaware, may experience the reassuring, healing presence of your Spirit; and that those whose life is nearing its end may find strength and renewal of faith in your Spirit's unshaken witness to that life which, for Christians, begins at death.

Gracious God, let this day and this service become a personal Pentecost for many of us, Renew the church beginning with us; with each of us and with all of us. And teach us through your Spirit how to proclaim the Good News of your faithfulness and love in new and effective ways.

We pray in the name of him to whom your Spirit bears witness, the Lord of Pentecost, the Lord of the church, our Lord Jesus Christ as we remember those words which Jesus prayed to you in saying.....“Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.”

Closing Hymn: “O Spirit of the Living God”

O Spirit of the living God, thou light and fire divine,
descend upon thy church once more, and make it truly thine.
Fill it with love and joy and power, with righteousness and peace;
till Christ shall dwell in human hearts, and sin and sorrow cease.

Blow, wind of God! With wisdom blow until our minds are free
from mists of error, clouds of doubt, which blind our eyes to thee.
Burn, winged fire! Inspire our lips with flaming love and zeal,
to preach to all thy great good news, God’s glorious commonweal.

Teach us to utter living words of truth which all may hear,
the language all may understand when love speaks loud and clear;
till every age and race and clime shall blend their creeds in one,
and earth shall form one family by whom thy will is done.

So shall we know the power of Christ who came this world to save;
so shall we rise with him to life which soars beyond the grave;
and earth shall win true holiness, which makes thy children whole;
till, perfected by thee, we reach creation’s glorious goal!

Benediction:

As we return to our lives, let us return in the assurance that God does not remain hidden in a cloud, concealed from us. For God is still among us!

Let us not gaze longingly at heaven for a sign. For God is revealed!

Let us glimpse the face of Christ in one another. Let us celebrate the Holy Spirit, who works in our community. Let us give glory to God our Creator, today and every day. Amen.

Postlude: “Toccata in F Major” Deitrich Buxtehude