



# 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

# *Third Sunday after Pentecost*

## **June 21, 2020**

**Prelude:**

**Praeludium and Praeambulum**

**Scheidemann**

### **Gathering Thoughts:**

Dear Brothers and Sisters as we begin the summer season on the calendar and the days are longer and hotter, you are all in my thoughts. I get concerned that there may be things happening in your lives that I am unaware of and wish that you would share them. Having to maintain social distancing many of us are not able to share our joys and concerns as we have during fellowship and in worship. I with the Trustees and Deacons continue to communicate as to what worship and gathering will look like once we are confident that it is safe to do so. It will happen, we just aren't sure of the date and restrictions. Keep the faith and hope to see you soon.

*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 our Provider, we have gathered as the church today needing you in different ways.

Some of us need strength because we are facing a big challenge.

Some of us need hope, because we feel like giving up.

Some of us need love, because we are feeling alone.

We trust that you will provide for us, whether through words or music, or in a quiet moment of reflection.

You are here; you are everywhere; for you are with us.

Amen.

### **Opening Hymn:**

**"In Christ There Is No East or West"**

**John Oxenham**

In Christ there is no east or west,  
In him no south or north,  
But one great fam'ly bound by love  
Throughout the whole wide earth.

In him shall true hearts ev'rywhere  
Their high communion find;  
His service is the golden cord  
Close binding humankind.

Join hands, disciples in the faith,  
Whate'er your race may be!  
Who serve each other in Christ's love  
Are surely kin to me.

In Christ now meet both east and west,  
In him meet south and north,  
All Christly souls are one in him  
Throughout the whole wide earth.

### **A Time of Prayer:**

O God, we trust in your power, even as it is often found in weakness;  
in your wisdom, even as it is expressed in seeming foolishness;  
in your wholeness, even as it comes to us amid brokenness.  
We do not ask this day for dazzling displays of strength, electric exercises of  
intellectual prowess or marvelous manifestations of miracles.  
We come simply to worship you.  
Touch us this day, O Lord, sinners that we are, that we might become your  
saints, your body, your children, your church.  
For this temple of your Spirit is built not upon our own abilities, knowledge  
or restorative skill, but upon you, in Jesus Christ. Amen.

### **A Reading from the Scriptures:**

**Matthew 10:24-39 (NIV)**

24 'A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master; 25it is  
enough for the disciple to be like the teacher, and the slave like the master. If  
they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they  
malign those of his household!

26 'So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be  
uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. 27What I say  
to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim  
from the housetops. 28Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill  
the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. 29Are  
not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the  
ground unperceived by your Father. 30And even the hairs of your head are all  
counted. 31So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.  
32 'Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will  
acknowledge before my Father in heaven; 33but whoever denies me before  
others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven.

34 ‘Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.

35 For I have come to set a man against his father,  
and a daughter against her mother,  
and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law;

36 and one’s foes will be members of one’s own household.

37Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and  
whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; 38and  
whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of

me. 39Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for  
my sake will find it.

**Musical Interlude**

**I’ve Found a Friend**

**Robert W. Thygerson**

**The Message:**

**“The Image of Christ”**

Whenever you have been a witness to a crime or some other event quite possibly you will be asked to describe what or who you saw. You are being asked in essence to identify the person or persons as best you can recollect. While we have not physically seen Jesus Christ, I would venture to say that in your own mind you could give a physical description of the image you have in your mind.

So if asked, how would you describe the image that you have of Jesus?

On Reconciliation Sunday, the leader and facilitator of a workshop at a local Midwest church introduced a discussion by showing two images of Jesus.

The first was a painting by Stephen Sawyer, titled “Undefeated.” (NOTE: To see this image, go to [“The Iconic Jesus,”](#) January 1, 2006). He depicts Jesus as a boxer standing inside a boxing ring. In his corner, we find the word “Savior” printed on the protective padding of the corner post, and hanging from the ropes are the boxing gloves with the word “mercy” written upon them.

When the speaker flashed the image on the screen, he heard a gasp from Jackie, a lady sitting near the front row. She was shaking her head, and exclaiming, “No, no, that’s not my Jesus! That image is just wrong.”

Later, she would talk about how the image of Jesus she holds onto is the Jesus who is the Prince of Peace. That image of Jesus dressed as a boxer was the furthest thing from a Prince of Peace.

The image of Jesus as an undefeated boxer was followed by another image — this one by Nathan Greene, titled “The Good Shepherd.” This image shows Jesus holding a black lamb.

When looking at these images side by side, one has to ask, “How did we go from an image of a loving, compassionate Good Shepherd who seeks out the lost sheep to one of Jesus standing in the corner of a boxing ring, gloves

off and ready to fight?”

We all have an image or two of Jesus. These conceptions tell us more about ourselves and our theology than they do about Jesus, for whom no real physical description exists.

Jackie had a point though. What do we do with the image of someone who says, “I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother”? (v. 35).

What do we do with words like, “Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me”? (v. 37). How would Jackie respond to someone who said, “I have not come to bring peace, but a sword”? (v. 34).

When we ponder the image of Jesus Christ that is at the core of our belief and understanding of who Jesus is,

- do we picture a Jesus who brings division or one who seeks unity?
- do we think of Jesus in terms of one who is the Prince of Peace, or a fighter?
- is Jesus someone who would encourage taking up the sword or taking up the cross?

Jackie believed in a Jesus who brings peace and seeks unity.

She does not believe in a warrior Jesus wearing boxing gloves or a scabbard and sword.

Would it make any difference if we understood that the sword Jesus brings to us is not made of steel, but wood — the wood of a cross? Jesus asks us to pick up our cross, and, if we don’t, we cannot be his follower.

The sword

When we hear Jesus say, “I have not come to bring peace, but a sword,” we think of a long blade of Toledo steel that has been forged and hammered into a weapon with a pointed end for thrusting and sharpened edges for slicing and cutting.

There are many types of swords. Some are short; others are long. Some are straight, while others have a curved blade. No matter the shape or size, each of them has one main purpose and that is to cut, slice or divide something. The sword seems to be associated with violence, whether as a weapon held by a soldier marching off to war or kept in the home for self-defense. In the many ways we might describe the sword, it stands as a direct opposite to a peaceful existence.

Throughout the Bible, we discover various references to swords. Usually, the sword is referred to as an instrument of a violent death as, for example, in Numbers: “And you will fall by the sword” (14:43). Swords produce death. Consider also Psalms 22: “Deliver my soul from the sword” (v. 20).

Swords are also referenced metaphorically, describing the greed of those with power and their swords being like teeth of those who would devour the poor (Proverbs 30:14).

Both Micah and Isaiah encourage beating the swords into something they see as more useful to the common good: ploughshares. Nations should not

take up the sword against nations, nor teach war anymore.

None of these images brings to mind an image of a sword that does not have the potential to bring harm or even death. Perhaps that is why we hear the voice of a little shepherd boy named David standing before Goliath in 1 Samuel 17, announcing to the taunting giant and all the Philistines “that all this assembly may know that the Lord does not save by sword and spear!”

Even Jesus, who in Matthew says, “I have not come to bring peace, but a sword” and who in Luke says, “the one who has no sword must sell his cloak and buy one” will later denounce the sword. When a sword is used to defend Jesus, he promptly orders that it be put away. He then heals the wound caused by the sword. In this very moment, even as those who would arrest him come carrying swords, he instructs the disciples to put away the sword, “for all who take the sword will perish by the sword” (26:52).

### Swords to crosses

Nowhere does Jesus support the use of a sword. Sometimes, these verses are used to support an image of a Jesus who condones violence toward others and supports the division of families. So what is Jesus really saying here? This passage is really about discipleship.

In the gospel of Matthew, Jesus gives a mission to the disciples, sending them out to heal, share the good news and ask for nothing in return.

However, Jesus also follows this up with a cost associated with discipleship. The disciples likely expected that their mission would be a successful one, and that by following Jesus, prosperity would follow.

But what Jesus actually says here is this: “Do not assume that because you’re a student and follower of mine that it’s going to be all apple pie and roses. Wrong! What is likely to happen is that father will be set against son, daughter against mother, etc. In other words, a lot of people, including your family members, will not get it. They will probably think you’re nuts.”

That’s Jesus’ warning. Following Jesus may feel more like a sword than a bath towel, more like the thorn than the rose itself. Jesus tells them that he cannot win for losing. No good deed goes unpunished. He will heal people, forgive and feed them and his enemies will call him the “Prince of demons” or Beelzebub.

How can the disciples who are sent out as sheep among wolves expect to fare any better? It’s a sword out there. Just so you know.

Jesus understands that by sending the disciples out in this way that they may share in the same fate that awaits him in Jerusalem; that as they teach peace, and even heal the outcasts of society, they will likely meet resistance and ridicule. They will be harassed and slandered. Doing the right thing can often produce division, putting you at odds with those who are close to you and do not see things the same way.

When you live the way Jesus taught, with radical hospitality to strangers, amazing love shown to enemies or compassion and mercy shown to the sick and the poor, then you are going to offend people who have a vested interest

in keeping the oppressed oppressed and the poor poor.

The sword that Jesus is talking about then is not a weapon of war, nor is it something to be wielded by the disciples.

Jesus does not say “pick up the sword” but rather, “Whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me.” The power of God is not found in the sword but in the cross.

So when Jesus said he came not to bring peace but a sword, it was his way of reminding his followers that if they were serious, they must embrace the probability of opposition, and they must accept the possibility of death.

Because when you pick up a cross, you are, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer as suggested, picking up the instrument of your own death.

What we do not see in this text, but what we know from Scripture is that when we do this, as Saint Francis notes in the prayer attributed to him, positive and good things happen: “In dying, we receive eternal life.”

**Musical Interlude      Ave Verum Corpus      Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart**

**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](mailto: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  
Family of Randy Phelps**

**Maria Piazza  
Melanie Pouliot**

**Jackie Reiss  
Martha Quinn  
Del Sampson  
Elwin Shepard**

**Ron Smith**

**Carole Ann Sumner and Henry**

**Donna Thorne**

**Marilyn Wales**

**Mary Wayman**

**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**

As we enter into this time of prayer, O God, we offer our gratitude that you are always present to us. Instill in us a desire to so listen to others. Help us to listen with open hearts and open minds, that others might feel safe in our presence. Instill in us a spirit of serenity that others might feel accepted in your nonjudgmental grace. Free us from the tendency to label people and ideas and allow us instead to lean into mercy and kindness.

In the stillness of these moments, we acknowledge the times when we have been less than kind, merciful and open. Thank you for never banning us from your presence, loving God; help us to so love and accept others.

We remember now those in need of your comforting presence: remember especially each of those whom we lift up and are encountering untold struggles.

Gracious God, we praise you for hearing the inmost desires of our hearts. We cast away our fears and anxieties. We lay it all before you. While we honor the past, we also look forward to the future with hope and love.



All of this we pray in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, who, while he was with us, taught us to pray, 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:**

**“Take Up Thy Cross”**

**Charles W. Everest**

1.  
“Take up thy Cross,” the Savior said,  
“if thou wouldst my disciple be;  
deny thyself, the world forsake,  
and humbly follow after me.”

2.  
Take up thy cross, let not its weight  
fill thy weak spirit with alarm;  
his strength shall bear thy spirit up,  
and brace thy heart and nerve thine arm.

3.  
Take up thy cross, nor heed the shame,  
nor let thy foolish pride rebel;  
thy Lord for thee the cross endured,  
to save thy soul from death and hell.

4.  
Take up thy cross and follow Christ,  
nor think till death to lay it down;  
for only those who bear the cross  
may hope to wear the glorious crown.

**Benediction:**

As Christ forgives us, so let us forgive others. As Christ loves us, so let us love others. Therefore to the love, grace and peace of God we commend you and all those you love, wherever they may be. Amen.

**Postlude**

**Bourbon**

**Thomas Anderson**