



# 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

# *Fourth Sunday after Pentecost*

## **June 28, 2020**

**Prelude:**            **Echo Fantasia in Dorian Mode**

**J. P. Sweenlick**

### **Gathering Thoughts:**

Dear Brothers and Sisters as the conditions for us to be together continue to improve, the church leadership anxiously await when we are gathered in the sanctuary as one large family of faith. The situation will be different than we have ever experienced as we will continue to maintain social distancing and practicing the protocols that are intended to keep each of us safe. Some changes that we are seeing is that we will need to wear masks throughout the service, we will need to keep a distance of six (6) feet from those whom we do not reside, there will not be a time to gather before and after services for fellowship, and we will unfortunately be unable to sing or use hymnals for the time being. It will feel foreign to us because this is not what we are used to doing, but in strange times we make some sacrifices so that we can be together in one place. Our projected date for returning to the sanctuary continues to be week of September 1st. The leadership asks that you be patient and adhere to the protocols and regulations that we will be operating under. There is much that we need to accomplish as we turn our focus to the reopening process. Please continue to pray for each other and the church community as we live in different and changing times.

P.S. - the recording and posting of the church services on the various digital sites will continue after we reopen. As we do this we are looking for assistance in the purchase of equipment, the operating of the equipment, and the editing and posting of the services. If you are interested or know of individuals who might want to do this please speak with Pastor Dave or Paul Stansel. Please share with us any feedback of how you think the services are going and what improvements we should be doing. Just so that you are aware we are reaching more households every week since we started posting services, there is something new and wonderful that has come out of this pandemic because God has opened new doors to us.

*Please continue to keep the faith and we will see you soon.*

### **Let Us Rejoice as We Worship:**

God gives us one day at a time:  
Long enough for laughter to follow any tears;  
Deep enough for prayer and silence to dance together;  
Time enough to help someone in need;

Plenty of time to notice beauty and praise the Maker;  
Sufficient time to build a bridge for forgiveness or tear down a wall of  
resentment;  
The right time to embrace friends, smile at strangers, play with children, sing  
praise to God.  
Praise God for this day we are given.

### **Opening Hymn: “All Hail the Power of Jesus Name” Edward Perronet**

All hail the power of Jesus’ Name! Let angels prostrate fall;  
Bring forth the royal diadem, and crown Him Lord of all!  
Bring forth the royal diadem, and crown Him Lord of all!

Ye chosen seed of Israel’s race, Ye ransomed from the fall,  
Hail Him Who saves you by His grace, and crown Him Lord of all!  
Hail Him Who saves you by His grace, and crown Him Lord of all!

Sinners, whose love can ne’er forget the wormwood and the gall,  
Go spread your trophies at His feet, and crown Him Lord of all!  
Go spread your trophies at His feet, and crown Him Lord of all!

Let every kindred, every tribe, on this terrestrial ball,  
To Him all majesty ascribe, and crown Him Lord of all!  
To Him all majesty ascribe, and crown Him Lord of all!

Oh, that with yonder sacred throng we at His feet may fall!  
We’ll join the everlasting song, and crown Him Lord of all!  
We’ll join the everlasting song, and crown Him Lord of all!

### **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.

*To the leader. A Psalm of David.*

1 How long, O Lord? Will you forget me for ever? How long will you hide your face from me?

2 How long must I bear pain in my soul, and have sorrow in my heart all day long?

How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?

3 Consider and answer me, O Lord my God! Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep the sleep of death,

4 and my enemy will say, 'I have prevailed'; my foes will rejoice because I am shaken.

5 But I trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.

6 I will sing to the Lord, because he has dealt bountifully with me.

**Musical Interlude:**

**Chorale**

**Flor Peeters**

**The Message:**

**“Forgetting”**

As we age sometimes appears that our memories are not as good as they used to be when we were younger. Have you ever been told that you would forget where your head was if it wasn't attached. When it comes to forgetting, do you wish that you could just forget certain things and times in your life?

Like most teens, Jill Price had her share of difficulties — the usual highs and lows.

But Price's world was changing in ways that she didn't understand. No one else seemed to get it either. Since she was 8 years old, she could remember just about everything that happened to her. And then, when she was 14, she had the intuitive knowledge that her memory was complete. She could, in fact, remember everything that happened to her.

Her grades in school were average. She could not remember lists, names and dates — that sort of thing. But she had total recall about events she'd experienced. For example, she could remember the dates she saw the dentist from five years before. She knew what she was doing on any Christmas Day of years gone by.

She was blessed — or was she cursed? — with a memory that would not allow her to forget anything.

She couldn't forget!

Later, in the early 2000s, she would be the first person to be diagnosed with “Highly Superior Autobiographical Memory” (HSAM). After spending years working with Dr. James McGaugh, a neuroscientist and memory researcher with the University of California, Irvine, she co-authored a book about her life living with this syndrome: *The Woman Who Can’t Forget*.

The claim for what the media would describe as “total recall” is admittedly weird. This is “twilight zone” stuff that’s right up there with a sighting of a pizza-shaped flying saucer, or the face of Jesus seared on a flour tortilla.

Fortunately, as McGaugh and others began to work with Price, the truth of her claims became apparent. She had kept a diary, and this allowed researchers to verify her claims.

If you were asked to “name the dates of every single time you’ve visited” a doctor in the past five years, could you do it? Price could.

Since the media has caught wind of Price’s amazing memory and the HSAM phenomenon, others have come forward, including artist Nima Veisheh. Once, he corrected scientists when they erroneously cited a certain date on which Michael Phelps won his eighth gold medal during the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

Researchers believe that as few as 50 people in the world have HSAM.

And then there’s God.

God doesn’t just have “highly superior” memory.

God has the highest form of memory.

God has the memory of an elephant.

God has the memory of a mother.

God has a memory like no one else.

God is memory.

And yet, curiously, God can also forget.

So, let’s discuss what God cannot and can forget.

What God cannot forget:

To the psalmist, it seems apparent that God has indeed forgotten something — or someone. The writer — let’s assume it is David, as the heading of the psalm suggests — says that God has forgotten him! “How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?” (v. 1). To paraphrase the first sentence, we might put it this way: “Really? You’re still ignoring me, God?”

And then David says, “Can you really forget me forever?” And he doesn’t let up: “How long will you hide your face from me?” (v. 1). This latter expression is no doubt a reference to a more powerful person looking away from a less powerful subject or supplicant.

This evokes the image of the “hidden God,” or *Deus absconditus*, or *Deus otiosus* — the “idle God” who has withdrawn from the world to let creation and its inhabitants fend for themselves. In God’s absence, God forgets us — or so David believed.

David continues in this vein for the entire psalm. Four times, his complaint begins with “How long ...?”

This lament sounds very much like the breakup of a relationship. The jilted

party has phoned and left messages or texted a jillion times.

“Hey! How long are you going to ignore me, you jerk? How long are you going to keep running away from me? Do you think you can forget me forever? Could you please have the decency to tell me how long you are going to keep me hangin’ here, ‘cause I’m in some pain — as if you cared. But, of course, you’re not likely to care about my pain and the sorrow in my heart, now are you? It doesn’t seem to bother you that you’ve publicly humiliated me after I made such a show of declaring my undying and steadfast belief and trust in you! So how long am I supposed to put up with this crap?”

That’s the tone here. Raw. Bitter. Harsh.

This is pretty much Psalm 13.

Unfortunately for David, no answer comes from God.

David doesn’t get closure or relief. He’s left with doubts and despair.

Honestly now. Have we not had moments like this? Is this not an experience that we shared with David?

The gates of heaven are like brass. God’s away from the phone. God is not picking up. And so, God clearly doesn’t care. It would appear that God has run out on us, abandoned us and left no forwarding address.

And after all we’d gone through together.

In fact, you think that God has forgotten you. God is — shockingly — the forgetting God!

But, here’s the thing. There are some things that God cannot forget.

And you are one of them.

God may be omnipotent, but this is one thing that God cannot do. God cannot forget you.

There’s a remarkable passage in Isaiah — 49:14-16. It begins by noting that “Zion” complains that “the Lord has forsaken me, my Lord has forgotten me.” But then, a rhetorical question on the order of “Is the pope Catholic?” is posed: “Can a woman forget her nursing-child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb?”

Uh, well, no she cannot.

The text continues by asserting that it is more likely that a mother will forget her child than God will forget us.

Nope, not going to happen.

And then, there’s this addendum in verse 16: “See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands ...”

Old Testament scholars don’t agree on some of the specifics, but all agree that this is an allusion to the practice of what we might call religious tat work.

God says that we are tattooed on his palm!

It was quite common in the culture of those ancient days for a slave to bear a brand mark of his or her master on the arm or palm. Or, a soldier might want to write the name of his commanding officer on his hand. A religious acolyte might do the same thing with the name of her God. Sometimes this

was accomplished with needle punctures or staining the skin in some way.

Here, God is saying that the Divine, ineffable Creator and God of the universe has inscribed us in the palm of his hand. God cannot forget us. We're right there in his palm!

Of course, this is an anthropomorphic representation. Still, it represents in a puny, symbolic way a reality which must be much more fabulous, because a sign always signifies something greater than itself.

Tattooed in the hollow of the hand of God! That's beyond amazing!  
God cannot forget us.

And yet ... the psalmist clearly believes otherwise.

What can we do when our mind is telling us lies that the heart does not want to believe?

We think that God has abandoned us, but our heart does not quite believe it.

Isn't this what we call the trial or testing of our faith? It is the refiner's fire; it is how the "testing of your faith produces endurance; and let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing" (James 1:3-4). It is that "fiery ordeal" about which the apostle Peter writes (4:12), and about which we should not be surprised.

So then, we should not be surprised when confronted with moments of divine silence, according to the apostle Peter.

We should remember that, according to the apostle James, the testing of our faith has several positive outcomes.

We should have a conversation with God as did the psalmist in this text. Conversation is good. When we lift up our doubts and fears, our prayers become more authentic than ever! God doesn't mind, and perhaps welcomes, those moments when we get real.

And finally, we must act and move forward in faith as though God has not forgotten us. Because ... God has not forgotten us. The psalmist seems to have come to this place. He writes, "But I trusted in your steadfast love" (v. 5). Even when he felt ignored and forgotten, his trust in the steadfast love, loyalty of God brought him through the crisis.

So what God can forget or do we believe that God cannot forget anything? Does God have the same problem as Jill Price? Does God have a divine version of a Highly Superior Autobiographical Memory?"

God has a perfect memory, except for the curious gaps or lapses. When a child of God repents of sin, rebellion, disobedience, mistakes and wrongdoing, and when that same child asks for forgiveness, then God acts like most parents would. God forgives. What parent can resist a child who comes running and crying with remorse and regret? Of course, the child receives forgiveness and the human parent probably forgets about it in due time.

How often has someone apologized to you, and you wave your hand and say, "Aw, forget about it. No worries"?

God has the ability to forget ... our sins.

The Bible says, “I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more” (Jeremiah 31:34). According to Isaiah, “I, I am He who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins” (43:26). In the New Testament, we read: “For I will be merciful towards their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more” (Hebrews 8:12). And in the psalms, perhaps the same voice complaining about being forgotten by God, is now writing these words: “For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his steadfast love towards those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far he removes our transgressions from us” (Psalm 103:11-12).

Many people would say that Jill Price, the remarkable woman with the remarkable memory now called “Highly Superior Autobiographical Memory,” is blessed. Her abilities certainly come in handy in her job as an administrative assistant at a law firm.

But often her memories arise unbidden, chaotic and unwelcome. “Imagine being able to remember every fight you ever had with a friend, every time someone let you down, all the stupid mistakes you’ve ever made.”

And she remembers all this stuff.

God doesn’t. God forgets this stuff.

And we should, too.

**Musical Interlude:**

**The Agony in the Garden**

**Unknown**

**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**

**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**

**Our Church and all of its members and friends**

Awaken us, O God, to the dawning of a new day. Open our eyes that we might see the glories of your world in the twinkling of the stars on a cloudless night sky, the sparkle of dew on an intricate spider web and the shimmer of the sun on an endless sea. Let the wonders of your world engulf us in wonder and make our hearts light. As we marvel at your grandeur, we pray for those whose lives are filled with pain and have no cause for gratitude. May they feel comforted by your healing presence. We pray for those who care for those who are ill; may your love give them strength. We pray for those who work for peace: let it be that the light of your love might replace the dark realities of war. Help us to be peacemakers in our own corner of the world by responding to unreasonable people with compassion instead of anger. Keep our eyes open to the needs of others that your light might clearly shine as we strive to follow in the footsteps of the giver of light, Jesus the Christ, who taught us to say when we pray ..... “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:**

**“God Be With You Till We Meet Again”**

**Jeremiah E. Rankin**

God be with you till we meet again; By His counsels guide, uphold you,  
With His sheep in love enfold you; God be with you till we meet again.

God be with you till we meet again! 'Neath His wings protecting hide you,  
Daily manna still provide you; God be with you till we meet again!

God be with you till we meet again! When life's perils thick confound you,  
Put His arms unfailing round you; God be with you till we meet again!

God be with you till we meet again! Keep love's banner floating o'er you,  
Smite death's threatening wave before you; God be with you till we meet  
again!

**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:

**Prelude in G Major**

**H. L. Schwartz**