



# **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

# ***Fifth Sunday after Pentecost***

## **July 5, 2020**

**Prelude: I Variation on America**

**Michael P. Hensworth**

### **Gathering Thoughts:**

Dear Brothers and Sisters as all things continue to improve and we become more anxious, we yearn to be together as we have in days gone by. Those days are coming, with the grace and patience given by God we will endure this storm. We continue to work on developing a plan that will allow us to worship God while holding in concern the people to whom the church is called to serve. May you continue to be well as our hearts and soul begin to look towards September when we are together once again (provided that we aren't in a second wave of the pandemic.) The leadership misses each of you and pray that you will continue to be well. Until then enjoy the summer warmth and the warmth of God's love for each of you.

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

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

The love of God is more splendid than purple mountain majesties.  
God's word of grace fills the spacious skies.  
The amber waves of grain remind us of God's abundant care.  
Above the fruited plain is God's eternal joy in anyone who turns from sin and follows the path of truth.  
In every nation, in every heart, God is working for good.  
Let our songs rise, and let God's praise be heard from sea to shining sea.

**Opening Hymn: "America the Beautiful" Katharine Lee Bates**

O beautiful for spacious skies, for amber waves of grain.  
For purple mountains majesties, above the fruited plain!  
America! America! God shed his grace on thee.  
And crown thy good with brotherhood, from sea to shining sea!

O beautiful for pilgrim feet, whose stern impassioned stress.  
A thoroughfare of freedom beat, across the wilderness!  
America! America! God mend thine every flaw,  
Confirm thy soul in self control, thy liberty in law.

O beautiful for heroes proved, in liberating strife.  
Who more than self their country loved and mercy more than life!  
America! America! May God thy gold refine.  
Till all success be nobleness and every gain divine!

O beautiful for patriot dream, that sees beyond the years  
Thine alabaster cities gleam, undimmed by human tears!  
America! America! God shed his grace on thee.  
And crown thy good with brotherhood, from sea to shining sea!

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

Creator and Ruler of humankind: While songs of our nation's birth ring in our hearts, remind us to celebrate above all the oneness of the race you have created and the openness of the church you have loved. And help us, who are your church in this place, to be truly open to all your children and to pray for the coming of the day when all shall be one in him who has broken down all the walls that now divide us, even Jesus Christ, the Lord of both church and world. Amen.

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

**Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30 (NIV)**

16 'But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the market-places and calling to one another,

17 "We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn."

18For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, "He has a demon"; 19the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, "Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax-collectors and sinners!" Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.'

25 At that time Jesus said, 'I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; 26yes, Father, for such was your gracious will 27All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

28 'Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 29Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.'

**Musical Interlude**

**II Variation on America**

**Michael P. Henwsorth**

### **The Message:**

**"Which Generation Is the Greatest?"**

There is a debate that arises almost every time we hear the question, "What is the greatest generation?" In most of our minds there is still only one answer.

Jesus posed a question, "To what will I compare this generation?" this needs to be answered by each generation for itself.

"To what shall I compare this generation?" asks Jesus.

"What's up with kids today?" we ask ourselves.

It's always been a national pastime -- ragging on the younger generation and complaining about their lack of this, that or something or other.

NBC news anchor Tom Brokaw, however, comes flat-out and tells us who gets the nod as "The Greatest Generation." In a book by the same title (New York: Random House, 1998), he argues that it is the GI Generation that stormed the beaches of Normandy in World War II, that went to work in American factories, that bought bonds to support the war effort -- that this is the greatest generation.

These are the ones, women and men, the living and the dead, who willingly gave their lives, who gave their limbs, who gave their sweet nightly dreams of childhood over to the enduring nightmare of real war -- The Big One -- the war that honestly and truly saved the world from fascism, the war that protected the home of the brave, the land of the free so we might grow up in safety, democracy and prosperity.

But you know what? They're not the greatest generation. I realize that to say that on this weekend when we celebrate the birth of our nation borders on patriotic heresy, I ask that you listen from a theological perspective rather than in the tone of nationalistic pride.

It is difficult not to compare, for they performed innumerable acts of quiet heroism that changed history, and in the process became a stalwart population of people with tenacity forged in the battles of the South Pacific, in Northern Africa and in Europe.

When the war ended and they returned to their homes to marry and raise children, they had, by virtue of participation in a global war, matured beyond their years.

- They came home with leadership skills.

- They came home with a strong sense of personal responsibility and patriotism.

- They came home to do their duty, to work with honor and live with faith.

- They came home to a new start and to rebuild a nation damaged by the

Depression. They did so community by community as active citizens, as Good Samaritans.

When we look at our parents or grandparents or even our great-grandparents of the GI Generation, it's hard for our own generational self-esteem not to take a beating. And why not? How can you top saving the world from Hitler? We honor them.

But they're not the greatest generation.

Sure, they overcame tremendous obstacles. "They became part of the greatest investment in higher education that any society ever made, a generous tribute from a grateful nation. The GI Bill, providing veterans tuition and spending money for education, was a brilliant and enduring commitment to the nation's future," Brokaw says. The GI Bill provided opportunity unheard of in the history of our democracy.

Dan Hodermarsky, for example, was a child of poverty, an underprivileged 12th child of a blue-collar Pennsylvania family, a veteran of the Battle of the Bulge. Dan came home from the war suffering from what we now recognize as Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome, but who then rose to prominence in his field. Like thousands of veterans, "Hodo" went to school on the GI Bill. He became an art teacher and an acclaimed artist, the beloved mentor of hundreds of students. In the late 1960s, Dan, a child of poverty, a veteran of the GI Bill, founded what is reputed to be the most highly regarded art department of any prep school in America. His story is repeated in many and various forms across this nation.

But his is not the greatest generation.

That generation changed things. In fact, they unwittingly carved out more social change than many of their picket-line-walking, peace-marching children. Compare the women of these generations. Women's Lib got started when Rosie the Riveter went to work 30 years before they thought of calling it Women's Lib. Women serving in fighting units during the Gulf War were a direct and traceable result of women serving in the WAVES and WACS and the front-line nurses of WW II. They were ordinary women like Colonel Mary Hallaren of the U.S. Army, Women's Auxiliary Corps, and General Jeanne Holm of the U.S. Air Force, who got their start in WW II.

Brokaw quotes Margaret Ray Ringenberg saying, "My father said, 'I didn't get to serve and I don't have any boys, so I guess you'll have to do it'". So off she went to fly all sorts of aircraft in the Woman's Air Force Service Pilots. Ringenberg was typical of ordinary patriotic women of her day. The country was in trouble, there was a need, there was a job to do, so the women stood up and did it.



And when these boys and girls came home from the war, they weren't necessarily eager to stay put -- having seen the world.

Armed with higher education, armed with a worldly sense not shared by their parents, they sensed a new freedom, and a new determination ... and with those views, they relocated to distant cities. They blended the national population. They developed a new and strong middle class of mobile, success-oriented families, creating a new America, a powerful America. The social strata, previously permanent, segregated and separate, mixed in a manner unimagined ... creating prosperity, creating new ideas and, of course, creating trouble.

But they're not the greatest generation.

So which is? Which generation stands out in distinction? It's a difficult question. Actually, it's not that it's so difficult. It's a bad question. The wrong question. Because the greatest generation is not people born between a given set of years, but the people reborn in any age, at any age. The question is not of generational greatness, but regenerative greatness.

"To what shall I compare this generation?" asks Jesus. In utter frustration he bemoans the stubbornness of their hearts. "It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to one another, 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn'" (Matthew 11:16-17).

We all know that in scripture that Jesus wept. He also ranted and raved.

No matter what I do in the name of the kingdom, they find some reason to dismiss me. To ignore me. "Woe" he says. It's a word spell-checkers of our modern era don't even recognize. Woe to that generation that tries to trivialize me -- make me irrelevant.

Nevertheless, there was a remnant in that generation and every one that has followed, a remnant that danced when he piped and mourned when he dirged. The dance goes on today. But it's not Generation X, or Boomers, or Builders or Millennial kids. It's all those and more. It's every person from every generation who submits to regeneration of the heart.

People who through faith conquered kingdoms, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength, who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies.

People who were stoned and sawed in two. People who went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated. People of whom the world was not worthy.

That's the greatest generation. That's the generation here. The intergenerational church of God; marked not by the year of their birth, but by the call of the Master on their lives. Together we serve, strive, grieve, and die.

To call one generation the greatest immediately diminishes all generations who preceded it and all generations who follow it. It distracts us from the Christian truth that, before the Awesome Divine Presence of God, we are but one equal people, a single generation, a human generation. So today we honor all generations and their contributions which have brought us here in this time a place.

**Musical Interlude:   III Variation on America                   Michael P. Hensworth**

**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  
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**

**All members of our armed forces who have committed themselves  
to the protection of liberty**

**All who paid the ultimate sacrifice in serving our nation**

God of liberty, we rejoice in the blessed abundance you have bestowed on our cherished land. We praise you for the freedom of religious expression which allows us to gather the way we have today. We praise you for the freedom to say what we think without fear of the governing authorities. We praise you for the freedom to come and go as we please. We praise you for the benefits of education made available to all. We praise you for the freedom to dream our own dreams and to strive to make them come true. We praise you for the gift of living in a land un-torn by war. We rejoice in the bounty of this fruitful land, which provides us with plentiful food and beautiful places to rest and play.

In freedom we are strong, yet freedom is a fragile thing. Help us protect our freedoms through the exercise of personal and civic responsibility. Sting our conscience every time we say to ourselves, “Let someone else do it; it’s their problem; I don’t care.” Give us as citizens the brains to realize that poverty and violence anywhere weakens the nation everywhere, just as illness in one part of a body weakens the whole.

Help us choose leaders who will do what is necessary for the well-being of the nation, who will not simply promise to grant our selfish wishes in exchange for re-election. Help the citizens of this land to achieve consensus on our most pressing issues, so that united we can help our elected leaders lead with clarity, consistency and decisiveness.

As people who have been freed forever through the blood of Jesus Christ, help us defeat in ourselves the impulse to slavishly submit to the tyranny of self-interest and greed. Help us, whom you are preparing for eternity, to take the long-range view of what would be best for all, not merely what is



expedient for those who presently enjoy political and economic advantage. Inspire us to be advocates for people whose voices cannot be heard in the public debate, that all your people may have a share in honor and prosperity and hope. In Jesus' name we pray as we remember the words he taught us to say as 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."

## **Breaking and Sharing of the Bread and Cup**

### **Invitation:**

Brothers and Sisters you are welcome to gather with each other in the Spirit of breaking bread and sharing in the cup. As we do this we are united with one another as we are united with Christ at His table. You are invited to prepare yourself through the offering up of your prayer of confession.

### **Prayer of Confession:**

Risen Savior, you call us to your table of grace to enjoy your presence, to experience your healing, to be made one with your people of every time and place. But we dare not come to the table with dirty hands and sin-stained hearts. Only your forgiveness can make us clean within. We confess we have edged you to the fringes of our lives as we have become occupied with countless so-called "urgent" matters. We confess we have fooled ourselves into believing we are too busy to pray and too exhausted to serve. We have devised clever justifications for ignoring the poor and avoiding those in despair.

Forgive us, dear Lord, and help us do better. Help us order our days and our deeds according to your will. Open our hearts to the needs of those who cannot return our favors. Grant us pardon, and comfort us with the assurance of your Spirit. Then shall we be free to celebrate your feast of love with the saints of this and every time and place. Amen.

### **A Time of Remembrance and Sharing:**

We remember that Jesus on the night of His betrayal was gathered with His followers where they shared a meal. While they ate Jesus took a loaf of bread, he blessed it and broke it saying, "this is my body that is about to be broken for you, take and eat of this bread as you remember me." After having eaten the bread Jesus then took and poured out a cup of wine which he raised up to God and offered a blessing. He then took the cup and said to those gathered, "this is the cup of the new salvation that is about to be poured out for you, every time that you shall drink of this cup, remember me."

We now will share in the bread and cup as we remember Him.

## **Prayer of Thanksgiving:**

Faithful God, you have adopted us as your children, made us members of the body of Christ and chosen us as inheritors of your kingdom. We thank you that at your table, you renew your promises within us, empower us by your Spirit to witness and to serve, and send us out as disciples of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## **Closing Hymn: “Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory”      Julia Ward Howe**

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.  
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored.  
He hath loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift sword.  
His truth is marching on, His truth is marching

*Refrain.*

Glory, glory, Hallelujah! Glory, glory, Hallelujah!  
Glory, glory, Hallelujah! His truth is marching on.

I have seen Him in the watch fires of a hundred circling camps  
They have builded Him an altar in the evening dews and damps  
I can read His righteous sentence by the dim and flaring lamps  
His day is marching on.

*Refrain.*

He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never call retreat;  
He is sifting out the hearts of men before his judgement seat;  
O be swift, my soul, to answer him; be jubilant, my feet!  
Our God is marching on.

*Refrain.*

In the beauty of the lilies, Christ was born across the sea  
With a glory in His bosom that transfigures you and me  
As He died to make men holy, let us live to make men free  
While God is marching on.

**Benediction:**

Go into the world, all of you who are weary and burdened, having experienced for this short hour the rest that comes in the presence of Christ. May you go now, refreshed and encouraged, to seek his will, and to do the work of the one who said, “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me.” Amen.

**Postlude:**

**Fugue in D Minor**

**J.S. Bach**