



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

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost

August 16, 2020

Prelude: What a Friend We Have in Jesus

Gathering Thoughts:

Dear Brothers and Sisters, we are moving forward implementing the guidelines of the health community and those suggestions offered by you. We will continue to ask that you respect the regulations as set forth and respect each others to keep themselves and their loved ones safe. While we have established our target date for return please be aware that it could change based on the situation in the city, commonwealth, and nation. Looking forward to seeing and being with each of 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 Glory, Laud, and Honor”

Refrain:

All glory, laud, and honor, to thee, Redeemer, King,
to whom the lips of children made sweet hosannas ring.

Thou art the King of Israel, thou David’s royal Son,
who in the Lord’s name comest, the King and Blessed One.

(Refrain)

The company of angels are praising thee on high,
and we with all creation in chorus make reply.

(Refrain)

Thou didst accept their praises; accept the prayers we bring,
who in all good delightest, thou good and gracious King.

(Refrain)

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:

Genesis 45:1-15 (NIV)

45Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried out, ‘Send everyone away from me.’ So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. 2And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it. 3Joseph said to his brothers, ‘I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?’ But his brothers could not answer him, so dismayed were they at his presence. 4 Then Joseph said to his brothers, ‘Come closer to me.’ And they came closer. He said, ‘I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. 5And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. 6For the famine has been in the land these two years; and there are five more years in which there will be neither ploughing nor harvest. 7God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. 8So it was not you who sent me here, but God; he has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt. 9Hurry and go up to my father and say to him, “Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not delay. 10You shall settle in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children’s children, as well as your flocks, your herds, and all that you have. 11I will provide for you there—since there are five more years of famine to come—so that you and your household, and all that you have, will not come to poverty.” 12And now your eyes and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see that it is my own mouth that speaks to you. 13You must tell my father how greatly I am honored in Egypt, and all that you have seen. Hurry and bring my father down here.’ 14Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin’s neck and wept, while Benjamin wept upon his neck. 15And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; and after that his brothers talked with him.

Musical Interlude:

I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light

The Message:

“Known by Our Scars”

If you are a person of a certain age, there’s a pretty good chance that you have a series of scars on your body that reflect a childhood lived without bicycle helmets, elbow and knee pads, and a host of other safety devices designed to bubble wrap kids in safety these days. That banana-seated Schwinn bike with the sissy bar on the back and chopper wheel on the front no doubt led to a couple trips to the emergency room, a few stitches, and a good story.

Every scar is a memory, revealing an unfortunate accident, a random act of stupidity, or some kind of injustice. Maybe you were trying to imitate Evel Knievel on that rickety plywood ramp, or maybe the neighborhood bully hit you with a rock thrown in contempt. Or maybe the scars are less visible and yet run much deeper, the result of a deep wounds of the soul. However we got them, scars remind us that life isn’t fair and can be painful. Every time we look at a scar, we remember the story.

The Joseph story is a scar story about a young man’s wounds and recovery. His scars are numerous, and yet Joseph is able to interpret them in light of the larger story that God has in mind for him and his people. They are scars that are less badges of honor and more signposts pointing to the kind of suffering love that God has for us and for the world.

To recap the story in Genesis up to chapter 45, Joseph has been in Egypt for quite a while. As a boy, Joseph was a dreamer and the favorite of his father, Jacob, which led to no small amount of jealousy among his older brothers. His father made him “a long robe with sleeves,” which implies that his dad thought him to be a little more special than the others and expected him to do less work (Genesis 37:3). Joseph’s dreams had his brothers bowing down to him, and Joseph was young enough (and naive enough?) to tell them about it, and thus the sibling rivalry boiled over. When Joseph goes out one day to check on his brothers at his father’s request, they finally decide to get rid of him by tossing him into a well, stripping off his fancy coat, and then selling him into slavery. The brothers told their father he was eaten by a wild animal and presented their dad with the coat smeared in goat’s blood as fake proof — easy to do in the days before DNA testing!

Joseph is brought as a slave to Egypt and sold to an official named Potiphar, who saw Joseph’s potential and put him in charge of the household. Potiphar’s wife saw Joseph’s potential, too, but as a lover, not a worker. When Joseph refused to have an affair with her on moral grounds, she falsely accuses him of rape and has him thrown into prison.

If you’re keeping score, that’s at least two major scars: being sold unjustly as a slave and being unjustly accused of a crime. But Joseph doesn’t pick at those wounds. Instead, he makes a favorable impression on the prison warden, who puts him in charge of the other prisoners. He

becomes the interpreter of their dreams as well, and eventually rises again from the dungeon to interpret the dreams of the Egyptian Pharaoh himself. When Joseph predicts a great famine to come, Pharaoh appoints him as the equivalent of the prime minister in charge of the social and economic affairs of the empire. Once again, he is wearing a coat with long sleeves!

The famine strikes hard in Joseph's homeland of Canaan, where his still-in-the-dark father and scheming brothers still reside. They hear that there is grain stored up in Egypt, so they decide to take a shopping trip there, not knowing from whom they would be buying!

That's the recap of the story between Genesis 37 and 45. Joseph's life has been a bit of a rollercoaster to this point, with very high highs and low lows. There was plenty to celebrate but also plenty about which he could be bitter, especially toward the ones who put him in this situation. Joseph no doubt had scars from being tossed in the well, scars from being tossed in the dungeon, scars of rejection, scars of false accusation, and scars from longing to be in his father's presence once again.

And now, here in Genesis 45, Joseph stands over his begging brothers who don't yet recognize him, scarred for life by what they had done to him. He has every right to see himself as a victim, and we wouldn't blame him if he wanted some payback.

But Joseph refuses to give in to victimhood. He does not view his physical and emotional scars as reasons for despair or revenge. Incredibly, Joseph instead sees his scars as signs of God's providential grace.

Joseph "could no longer control himself" in that moment (45:1). He sent everyone out of the room except his brothers and, through his loud, wailing tears, he reveals the truth to them: "I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?" (v. 3). His brothers couldn't answer him. They were terrified, speechless, almost not believing what they were hearing and seeing. They had to believe that payback was coming swiftly.

But Joseph isn't there to inflict more scars on them. "I am your brother, Joseph," he said to them, "whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life" (vv. 4-5). Indeed, Joseph says, it was not you, my brothers, who sent me here, but it was God (v. 8). And because of God's provision, Joseph's family now had a place to go to survive the famine and, in effect, preserve the covenant God had made with Abraham earlier in Genesis.

Joseph looks back at the events of his life with a new vision where the scars of pain, injustice, rejection, and separation were only part of the story. Fast forward to Genesis 50:20, where he sums up all that he has learned from his scars. "Even though you intended to do harm to me," Joseph says to his brothers, "God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today." This is what we might call 50:20 vision — Genesis 50:20 vision. What the world, the human plan, the human scheme planned as an evil, self-serving act, God took and used for good, preserving life!

One of the persistent puzzles of the human experience is how we deal with evil in the world. As humans in a fallen world, we seem to live lives of

constant jeopardy. We are vulnerable to a wide range of evil, from sickness, to crime, to family dysfunction, to oppression, to all sorts of uncontrollable, wound-inflicting mayhem. In the midst of all of that, it's a legitimate question to ask or even cry out, "Where is God in all of this?"

Joseph's 50:20 vision tells us that despite all evidence to the contrary, God is still at work. God is making things good despite appearances. We suffer the scars, but the wounds of this life are not ultimately fatal for those who put their trust in him.

Does this mean that every tragedy we experience has a silver lining? That all evil is really good and that all our suffering is somehow being orchestrated by God?

Not at all.

Notice that the end of Genesis has the same message as the beginning. In Genesis 1, God creates the universe, the earth, and us and calls it all "good." By chapter 3, however, humans have rejected God's goodness for self-serving sin and yet, despite all human efforts to the contrary, God's intention for good overcomes. God used the slavery of Joseph to save his chosen family, through whom all the earth would be blessed. The God who does this is also the God who transforms the evil and unjust death of Jesus into the salvation of the world. God's goodness wins in the end, which is why the apostle Paul, even while languishing in prison with many scars of his own, could say, "We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).

Plastic surgeons routinely try to erase the scars people have accumulated over the years. There are cosmetic reasons to do so, but there may be spiritual reasons not to. Joseph didn't ask for his scars to be removed. He showed them to his brothers and saw them as signs of ultimate healing. The risen Jesus did the same. When he came out of the tomb, he still had the scars as identifiable marks of how God can make even the horror of death into a vehicle for good that blesses the whole creation with restoration and renewal.

What scars do you carry? What are the physical, emotional, psychological, or spiritual scars that mark your life? How might they become signs of healing and occasion for a new vision of life for you and others you meet? Joseph looked at the scars of slavery and saw that God had a saving plan for his life and the lives of his people. Perhaps the scars you carry can enable you to speak into the pain of someone else's life. Showing that scar of past abuse may help others have the courage to seek healing. Revealing that pain of loss may put you in a powerful position to help others who are grieving. We didn't ask for these scars, nor did God inflict them upon us; and yet, those scars can make known to the world how God can make good out of the worst situations.

Scars never go away, and yet the scars of Joseph and Jesus remind us that the tears we shed, the emotional pain inflicted on us, and the heartache of loss will all become memories one day, like the scars of Jesus. We still bear the marks, but they need not hurt us any longer. They can be signs of healing for us and for the world.

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****Diana Escarbie****Cathy Fontaine****Chuck Funk****Bob and Pat Goguen****Linda Hurd****Mary Jackson****Tom Kazanjian****Sarah Kee****Bob and Doris Lane****Diane Lane Cormier****Jean LeClair****Linda Long****Lorraine Michaud****Audrey Painchaud****Maria Piazza****Chris Pollice****Melanie Pouliot****Jackie Reiss****Martha Quinn****Del Sampson****Elwin Shepard****Ron Smith****Carole Ann Sumner and Henry****Donna Thorne****Daniel Tousignant****Marilyn Wales****Mary Wayman**

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**

Mighty God of great mercy, we pray for all those whose lives are governed by fear — of failure, pain, illness, loss and the fears we lay before you now, both aloud or silently.

Holy God of hope, we pray for all those who seek reconciliation — with a family member, a friend, a coworker and any we name before you now, both aloud or silently.

Loving God of compassion, we pray for those ill in body, mind or spirit, especially those we name before you now, both aloud or silently.

Merciful God of grace, we pray for all those living in anger — in naming those things that make us angry before you now, both aloud or silently, may the anger be released.

Holy God, we lift all the concerns of our hearts and minds and ask you to renew, strengthen and restore us. These are our prayers this day and now let us pray together as Jesus taught us to pray 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: “Great Is Thy Faithfulness”

Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father, there is no shadow of turning with Thee;
Thou changest not, Thy compassions, they fail not; as Thou hast been Thou forever wilt be.

Refrain

Great is Thy faithfulness! Great is Thy faithfulness! Morning by morning
new mercies I see;
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided—Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord,
unto me!

Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest, sun, moon and stars in their
courses above,
Join with all nature in manifold witness to Thy great faithfulness, mercy and love.

Refrain

Great is Thy faithfulness! Great is Thy faithfulness! Morning by morning
new mercies I see;
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided—Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord,
unto me!

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth, thine own dear presence to cheer
and to guide;
Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow, blessings all mine, with ten
thousand beside!

Refrain

Great is Thy faithfulness! Great is Thy faithfulness! Morning by morning
new mercies I see;
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided—Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord,
unto me!

Benediction:

Go forth in the love of God, shed abroad in your hearts by the Holy
Spirit. Go forth more for the needs and concerns of others than for your
own interests. Go forth to honor the name of Jesus Christ — ushering in his
kingdom for all to see. Amen.

Postlude:

Immortal, Invisible, God only Wise