



# ***Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost***

## **October 4, 2020**

**Prelude:**

**Prelude in B flat Major**

**Johan Meyer**

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

People of faith, we are God's children.  
We are God's heirs, God's legacy.  
We have nothing to fear, for in Christ, God's love is poured out upon us.  
Let our lives proclaim the truth that God is love and perfect love casts out fear.

**Opening Hymn:**

**"O Word of God Incarnate"**

**#598 UMH**

O Word of God incarnate, O Wisdom from on high,  
O Truth unchanged, unchanging, O Light of our dark sky:  
We praise You for the radiance that from the hallowed page,  
A lantern to our footsteps, shines on from age to age.

The church from You, our Savior, received the gift divine,  
And still that light is lifted o'er all the earth to shine.  
It is the sacred vessel where gems of truth are stored;  
It is the heav'n-drawn picture of Christ, the living Word.

The Scripture is a banner before God's host unfurled;  
It is a shining beacon above the darkling world.  
It is the chart and compass that, all life's voyage through,  
'Mid mists and rocks and quicksands, to you, O Christ will guide.

Oh, make your church, dear Savior, a lamp of purest gold,  
To bear before the nations your true light as of old.  
Oh, teach your wand'ring pilgrims by this their path to trace,  
Till, clouds and darkness ended, they see You face to face.

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

Amazing God of the universe, you have called us from different walks of life. From our diverse backgrounds, you have weaved us into a family of faith and discipleship. We pray that even as you have accepted us as we are, we can learn even more how to accept and love others whose ways are different from our own.

As we open our hearts to you, show us the way to open our hearts to others. We pray, O God, that you would even challenge us to love all

humankind — those we do not like and especially our “enemies.” In your presence here, O God, may we worship together without exclusion and rejoice together always. Amen.

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

**Exodus 20:1-4, 7-9, 12-20 (NIV)**

20 Then God spoke all these words:

2 I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; 3you shall have no other gods before me.

4 You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.

7 You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.

8 Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. 9For six days you shall labour and do all your work.

12 Honour your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

13 You shall not murder.

14 You shall not commit adultery.

15 You shall not steal.

16 You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.

17 You shall not covet your neighbour's house; you shall not covet your neighbour's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour.

18 When all the people witnessed the thunder and lightning, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking, they were afraid and trembled and stood at a distance, 19and said to Moses, ‘You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, or we will die.’ 20Moses said to the people, ‘Do not be afraid; for God has come only to test you and to put the fear of him upon you so that you do not sin.’

### **Musical Interlude:**

**Make Me a Channel of Your Peace**

**Sebastian Temple**

### **The Message:**

**“Families”**

“Americans have less family than ever before.”

That’s a claim from David Brooks, commentator on PBS NewsHour, Meet the Press and elsewhere. Writing in The Atlantic back in February, he made that statement in an article titled, “The Nuclear Family was a Mistake.”

A mistake?

You might find that title startling because, despite the makeup of the

family you grew up in, if you're like most of us, you probably think of the nuclear family — a married couple with 2.5. kids — as the ideal. Brooks writes, “We take [that] as the norm, even though this wasn't the way most humans lived during the tens of thousands of years before 1950, and it isn't the way most humans have lived during the 55 years since 1965.”

The two dates Brooks mentions — 1950 and 1965 — are significant. After telling how for millennia people lived in clans or extended families, with all the support and benefits those clusters provided, he went on to explain how with the opening of factories in big U.S. cities in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, young adults left their extended families to chase the American dream in those urban settings. By themselves there, they often married as soon as they could, and with their spouse and children, became families on their own — what came to be called nuclear families — separated by distance from their families of origin.

And Brooks says that for a time, specifically between 1950 and 1965, families in the nuclear configuration seemed to work. “From 1950 to 1965, divorce rates dropped, fertility rates rose, and the American nuclear family seemed to be in wonderful shape,” Brooks says. “And most people seemed prosperous and happy. In these years, a kind of cult formed around this type of ... ‘togetherness’. ...”

This led to the assumption that healthy people lived in two-parent families.

Brooks explains that the years between those two dates are the only time that nuclear families appeared to work because in those years, women were relegated to the household, men earned enough to be the breadwinners and nuclear families formed close ties with other nuclear families creating “extended families” of a sort. Other conditions in society supported nuclear families as well.

But all that has since fallen apart, so that today, says Brooks, “only a minority of American households are traditional two-parent nuclear families and only one-third of American individuals live in this kind of family.”

Brooks adds that the “1950–65 window was not normal. It was a freakish historical moment when all of society conspired, wittingly and not, to obscure the essential fragility of the nuclear family.”

Our purpose today is not to knock the nuclear family, and we all know people who manage theirs just fine. But Brooks' statement about extended families having been the norm for “tens of thousands of years before 1950” helps us realize just how remarkable is the fifth of the Ten Commandments: “Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you” (Exodus 20:12).

The commandment is remarkable in an age and place when the language didn't even have a separate term for “nuclear family” and where four generations at a time typically lived together. In fact, the Hebrew word for family, *bayit*, is a flexible term, covering all those who live in one dwelling. That could be just a married couple and their children, but it also covered all the people who lived together, including multiple generations of relatives

by blood or marriage, as well as servants, slaves, concubines, resident immigrants, sojourners, day laborers and orphans. Thus, when someone in ancient Israel used the word “bayit” (family), hearers would, at a minimum, think of what we today call “extended family.”

Yet, even in that culture, the fifth commandment singles out fathers and mothers for honor.

Among the strengths of extended families, says Brooks, are two especially.

One is resilience. In extended families, there are others in addition to just the parents to help carry out the daily tasks of life. And if, for example, a mother dies or a father loses his job, siblings, aunts, uncles and grandparents can help fill the void, especially with the most vulnerable family members, the children. If one parent is difficult for his children to live with, others can fill the breach. And when crises happen, older family members may have some helpful perspective.

The other primary strength of extended families is their socializing force. “Multiple adults teach children right from wrong, how to behave toward others, how to be kind,” says Brooks. And in a culture that often seems to have no taboos, extended families can be “a moral haven in a heartless world.”

It stands to reason that growing up in a family that has resilience and socializing force increases your likelihood of having a better life — maybe even a longer life, as the commandment suggest — than if you didn’t have that family in your corner. In fact, in the restatement of the Ten Commandments in Deuteronomy 5, the wording is “Honor your father and your mother ... so that your days may be long and that it may go well with you in the land that the Lord your God is giving you”.

So, with these benefits of extended families so evident, why doesn’t the commandment say, “Honor your elders, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you” or “Honor your kin ...” or “Honor your household ...”?

We don’t know. The Bible never explains it.

But we do know that the commandment sought to make sure the elderly, who could no longer contribute to the family unit’s financial viability, would not be disregarded or shunted. The command protected parents from being driven out of the home or abused after they could no longer work.

By looking at the original Hebrew of the commandment, we also know that it was not calling for obeying one’s parents. The word translated as “honor” is *kābēd*, which includes among its meanings, “be heavy,” in the sense of “give weight to,” as opposed to treating someone too lightly. So the commandment calls for treating parents with appropriate seriousness.

In other words, it addressed the generations then in the fullness of life’s powers to take seriously the generations then in vulnerability. In this sense, the fifth commandment tells the full grownups to give weight to the concerns of the children and it tells the grown children to give weight to the concerns of the declining seniors.

Thus, the fifth commandment is not about whether we live in nuclear or



extended families, but about the struggle between the generations, one that has its share of tensions. Older generations can get too attached to “the way things used to be,” and younger generations too attached to the notion that nothing important happened until they came along. The commandment calls both older and younger generations not necessarily to capitulate to the other, but to treat each other with seriousness that allows for freedom and response.

In calling the nuclear family “a mistake,” Brooks is highlighting what resources are lost to those small units by not living in extended family configurations. He suggests looking for creative ways to add such resources back in.

We know that not every extended family should remain together and that some can be quite toxic. In fact, elsewhere Exodus refers to that very thing: “The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, yet by no means clearing the guilty, but visiting the iniquity of the parents upon the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation”.

While initially we may hear that as harsh judgment, it’s actually just stating a reality. Four generations were usually the number living together in one clan. Thus, toxic sin in one generation is going to affect negatively all who are living together at the time of the wrongdoing, even the third and fourth generation.

But assuming poisonous sin is not going on, extended families can bring to the combined unit resilience and socializing force.

Brooks wasn’t suggesting that we somehow all go back to the past. We can’t go back, and even if we could, the tensions between generations aren’t going to go away.

But the fifth commandment provides a way to tap into the resources of the extended family, even if we live apart: Honor one another. Value one another. Take one another seriously. Don’t take each other too lightly. Allow appropriate freedom and room to grow.

The fifth commandment gives us a place to start, and it tells us that God wants it that way.

## **Musical Interlude:**

## **Cantique**

## **Flor Peeters**

***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.

God of great love, we offer our gratitude for our family and our friends, and for friends who are family. We are ever thankful for this church and our church family gathered here. We pray for the safekeeping of all whom we

love and we pray for your healing presence for all those who are ill whom we name in our hearts. We pray for our nation and its leaders. May they seek your wisdom and strength and may they lead us in the ways that make for peace. We pray for our world; especially do we pray for those who live where fighting is a way of life and where children carry guns instead of teddy bears. Let it be that all of us might be instruments of your peace and love. God of us all, let us answer words of anger with patience and let us respond to disagreements with compromise. Above all, let us speak the language of faith, especially when we travel roads of uncertainty and fear. We offer our praise and our prayers to the One whose footsteps we strive to follow, 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: "All Creatures of Our God and King" #62 UMH**

All creatures of our God and King, Lift up your voice and with us sing,  
O praise ye! Alleluia!  
O brother sun with golden beam, O sister moon with silver gleam!

*Refrain:*

O praise ye! O praise ye!  
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

O brother wind, air clouds, and rain, By which all creatures ye sustain,  
O praise ye! Alleluia!  
Thou rising morn, in praise rejoice, Ye lights of evening, find a voice!

*Refrain:*

O sister water, flowing clear, Make music for thy Lord to hear,  
Alleluia! Alleluia!  
O brother fire who lights the night, Providing warmth , enhancing sight,

*Refrain:*

Dear mother earth, who day by day, Unfoldest blessings on our way,  
Alleluia! Alleluia!  
The flowers and fruits that in thee grow, Let them God's glory also show!

*Refrain:*

All ye who are of tender heart, forgiving others, take your part  
O praise ye! Alleluia!

Ye who long pain and sorrow bear, Praise God and on him cast your care!

*Refrain:*

Let all things their Creator bless, And worship him in humbleness,

O praise ye! Alleluia!

Praise, praise the Father, praise the Son, And praise the Spirit, Three in One!

**Benediction:**

Go forth now — always and everywhere be loving to each other — to be loving to friend, neighbor, stranger, the needy, our family and even those whom we do not like.

Be helpful and compassionate to all everywhere. Be thankful now and always for the promise of eternal life. Go in peace. Amen.

**Postlude:**

**O God Almighty Father**

**PRAYER LIST**

Amy Belli

Carolyn Barney

Jack Brigham

Becky Colwell

David Dufour

Diana Escarbie

Cathy Fontaine

Chuck Funk

Bob and Pat Goguen

Donald Hanks

Jerilyn Hoffman

Linda Hurd

Mary Jackson

Tom Kazanjian

Sarah Kee

Bob and Doris Lane

Diane Lane Cormier

Linda Long

Lorraine Michaud

Audrey Painchaud

Maria Piazza

Melanie Pouliot



Jackie Reiss  
Martha Quinn  
Del Sampson  
Elwin Shepard  
Ron Smith  
Arlene Sirois  
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

# **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