



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

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost

October 18, 2020

Prelude: **Softly, and Tenderly Jesus is Calling**

Let Us Rejoice as We Worship

O give thanks to the Lord, call on his name, make known his deeds among the peoples.

Sing praises to God; tell of all God's wonderful works.

Seek the Lord and his strength; seek God's presence continually. Remember the wonderful works he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he uttered, O offspring of his servant Abraham, children of Jacob, his chosen ones.

You asked, and God brought quails, and gave you food from heaven in abundance.

For God remembered his holy promise. Praise the Lord! Amen.

—Adapted from Psalm 105:1-6, 40, 42

Opening Hymn: **“We Give Thee but Thine Own”** **Schumann**

We give thee but thine own,
whate'er the gift may be;
all that we have is thine alone,
a trust, O Lord, from thee.

May we thy bounties thus
as stewards true receive,
and gladly, as thou blessest us,
to thee our first fruits give.

To comfort and to bless,
to find a balm for woe,
to tend the lonely in distress
is angels' work below.

The captive to release,
to God the lost to bring,
to teach the way of life and peace,
it is a Christlike thing,

And we believe thy word,
though dim our faith may be:
whate'er for thine we do, O Lord,
we do it unto thee.

A Time of Prayer:

Eternal God, we gather to sing praises to your name. Through good times and bad, through darkness and light, you are with us. Your faith in us is strong and true. We ask, O God, that you would nourish us with an ever-growing and maturing faith. Give our lives an exciting sense of your presence, and may we worship you confidently and forcefully, in the name of Jesus. Amen.

A Reading from the Scriptures:

Exodus 33:12-23 (NIV)

12 Moses said to the Lord, ‘See, you have said to me, “Bring up this people”; but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. Yet you have said, “I know you by name, and you have also found favour in my sight.” 13Now if I have found favour in your sight, show me your ways, so that I may know you and find favour in your sight. Consider too that this nation is your people.’ 14He said, ‘My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.’ 15And he said to him, ‘If your presence will not go, do not carry us up from here. 16For how shall it be known that I have found favour in your sight, I and your people, unless you go with us? In this way, we shall be distinct, I and your people, from every people on the face of the earth.’

17 The Lord said to Moses, ‘I will do the very thing that you have asked; for you have found favour in my sight, and I know you by name.’ 18Moses said, ‘Show me your glory, I pray.’ 19And he said, ‘I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you the name, “The Lord”; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. 20But’, he said, ‘you cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live.’ 21And the Lord continued, ‘See, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock; 22and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by; 23then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen.’

Musical Interlude:

Improvisation

Flor Peeters

The Message: “Empowerment given when Known by Name”

“A person’s name is to him or her the sweetest sound in any language,” said Dale Carnegie. However, many people struggle to remember a person’s name.

That’s especially true when there is a power imbalance in a relationship. Think of a professor with a large freshman class in an auditorium, where every student knows the teacher’s name, but he has to learn the names of a hundred students. Or maybe a high-ranking official in government who doesn’t know the names of the people who work for her. Or, closer to home, consider the pastor of a mid-size to large church who runs into an occasional attendee in the grocery store. The pastor may recognize the face but not know the name, while

the church attendee yells out, “Pastor Jim!” in an enthusiastic greeting that causes the other people in the cereal aisle to look in wonder.

Forgetting or failing to know someone’s name can be a real disconnect and creates social distance between people. We’ve all felt the sting of knowing someone we’ve met before, or even someone we respect and admire, who blows past us in the hallway without a second look because they don’t know our names. If Dale Carnegie is right, then the opposite must be true: not hearing our name must be the loudest, discouraging silence in any language!

What a difference it makes, then, when that professor actually greets one of those previously nameless, faceless students by name when passing him on campus. When that official pokes her head into a subordinate’s office and tells him by name what a good job he’s doing, it changes the relationship. And when that pastor knows the name of the person putting Rice Krispies into her cart, it makes her feel more connected to both the pastor and the church.

Learning names is a discipline that requires being fully present when meeting another person. Techniques for retaining a person’s name include repeating the name when you are introduced, using it in a sentence, spelling it out, and associating the name with something about the person. It’s not the technique that matters so much as the purpose. When you know someone’s name, you’re on the fast track to knowing them and being known by them.

As Moses meets with God throughout the Exodus story, it’s clear that there is a power imbalance at work. God is God, after all, and Moses is just a human; and yet, Moses had an intimacy with God that is unique in the Old Testament. As the writer of Exodus put it, God spoke to Moses “face to face, as one speaks to a friend” (Exodus 33:11).

Moses would speak with God at the Tent of Meeting, a place separate from the Tabernacle and outside the camp. The tent as a meeting place is significant because it implies mobility, and the conversation Moses has with God on this occasion will be about God’s travel plans with the Israelites. Moses is familiar enough with God by now to remind God of his promises. “See, you have said to me, ‘Bring up this people’; but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. Yet you have said, ‘I know you by name, and you have also found favor in my sight.’ Consider too that this nation is your people” (vv. 12-13).

This is the first of five times that we hear that Moses has found favor in God’s eyes in verses 12-17, and twice we read that God knows Moses “by name.” These phrases refer to God’s choice of Moses to be the leader of Israel, but they are also terms of endearment. Moses has already proven that he won’t separate himself from his people. While Moses was receiving the commandments on Sinai, the Israelites were dancing around a golden calf, and yet Moses still pleaded for his people: “But now, if you will only forgive their sin — but if not, blot me out of the book you have written” (32:32). Moses did not treat his people like a nameless, faceless horde. He knows them, and he uses God’s recognition of Moses’ own name as capital for what comes next.

Moses is bold enough to ask God for three things, the first of which is a question about whether God plans to continue traveling with the Israelites on their journey to the promised land. Moses came to realize the hard way that he

couldn't lead the people by himself. If God didn't plan to go along then, Moses said to him, "do not carry us up from here" (v. 15). For Moses, this is a test of God's name recognition of both Moses and his people. "For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people, unless you go with us? In this way, we shall be distinct, I and your people, from every people on the face of the earth" (v. 16).

God's response is to give Moses the assurance he is looking for — an assurance again based in the fact that God has found favor in Moses and knows him by name (v. 17). So Moses decides to go even deeper in the relationship by asking for the ultimate connection: "Show me your glory, I pray," he asks God (v. 18). It's an odd request since Moses seems to have witnessed God's glory previously (24:9-11, 15-18) and communicated with God directly (33:11). It seems as though Moses now wants to know more of God's character and person.

God's response is to not fulfill Moses' request in full, promising to show Moses his "goodness" rather than his glory, because no human can see God's face and live (33:20). The "goodness" God will reveal is, in many ways, even more impressive than another display of glory. Moses will be given a view of God's character — the goodness that he intends for Israel as he leads them to the promised land.

But God also promises to give Moses something powerful as a reminder of their relationship: "I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you the name, 'The Lord'" (v. 19). This recalls the initial encounter between Moses and God at the burning bush, where Moses asked for God's name, only to be told that God should be called, "I am who I am" (3:13-14). Now, Moses will hear the name Yahweh proclaimed as a revelation of God's goodness. God is not a nameless, faceless God who is some kind of neutral or indifferent force in the universe. God reveals to Moses that God is at work on behalf of his people, that he is trustworthy and good.

Moses and God know one another's names, and that connection leads to a partnership that saves a people. God will go ahead of the Israelites, as God had been doing since the Red Sea crossing. Moses had wanted another divine revelation of glory, but God will only show Moses his back as he hides the leader of the Israelites in the cleft of the rock (33:21-23). That shouldn't surprise us, however, because if God is out in front, it's his back that the Israelites will follow.

The Scriptures reveal many names for God, but one of the most powerful truths humans can know is that the God who created the universe knows our names. We will not be left in the slavery of sin by a God who doesn't know our names and is indifferent to us; we won't be abandoned in the wilderness by a God who turns a deaf ear to suffering; we won't have to navigate our way in the world without a God who knows the way to life. God knows your name! Jesus described the intimacy with which God knows us: that even all the hairs on our heads are numbered (Luke 12:7).

The flip side of that is that we know God's name, too. Indeed, we have come to know him not merely as a glorious figure into whose face we cannot look and still live; we have come to know him in the face of Jesus Christ. We have heard

his name and seen his glory, as John says, “the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). He promises to go ahead of us and be with us always, even to the end of the age (Matthew 28:20). He is God with a human face and, because of that, we do not have to guess at the goodness of God. We have seen it in person.

If God knows our names, then we as his people should make every effort to know the names of others and to proclaim the Lord’s name to them as well. As we know God through Jesus Christ, others will come to know God through those of us who follow Christ. When we take the time to learn their names, to value and connect with them, they begin to see a reflection of the God who knows them even more.

As the Gloria and Bill Gaither song suggests there is something about that name.

Jesus, Jesus, Jesus! There’s just something about that name!
Master, Savior, Jesus! Like the fragrance after the rain.
Jesus, Jesus, Jesus! Let all heaven and earth proclaim:
Kings and kingdoms will all pass away, but there’s something about that name!

What’s in a name? Everything! It’s the sweetest sound in any language.

Musical Interlude:

Adagio

Henry Purcell

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.*

Gracious and loving Creator, Sometimes the words just are not there. God, you are so amazing that our words and thoughts of how best to praise you pale in comparison to the splendors of your name. You are the Almighty, you are the Redeemer, you are grace never ending and the embodiment of love itself. And when we come to you in prayer, sometimes words fail us in what to say. Yes, we lift up our concerns, and yet sometimes they seem so small in comparison to the tribulations encountered across your creation. How can our problems compare to disasters people face, or the fighting that surrounds people trying to escape, or the horrors that no child should ever experience? Lord God, sometimes when we come to you to pray, we are clueless as to what we should ask for. You know the thoughts in our minds and the desires of our hearts, and there are times when they conflict. Sometimes we want what is not always the best for us, and there are times that we long to hold on to the things we should let go of. There are times when really the best thing

PRAYER LIST

Amy Belli
Carolyn Barney
Jack Bringham
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