



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

Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost

November 1, 2020

Prelude:

Prayer

Alexandre Guilmant

Let Us Rejoice as We Worship:

Jesus did not come to establish denominations.
He came to bring salvation to all who call upon his holy name.
Let us cast aside all that which is petty and irrelevant.
Let us put away childish things that only serve to bring division and duress.
The Lord calls us as one. God sees us as one.
We are the “church” together!

Opening Hymn: “Father, We Praise Thee”

Christe Sanctorium

Father, we praise thee, now the night is over;
Active and watchful, stand we all before thee;
Singing, we offer pray’r and meditation:
Thus we adore thee.

Ruler of all things, fit us for thy mansions;
Banish our weakness, health and wholeness sending;
Bring us to heaven, with your saints united;
Joy without ending.

All-holy Father, Son, and equal Spirit,
Trinity blessed, send us thy salvation;
Thine is the glory, gleaming and resounding
Through all creation.

A Time of Prayer:

Most loving God, you have given us a great multitude of witnesses whose lives have testified to the amazing power of your Son’s resurrection. By your presence among us, teach us the truth of life everlasting. Through this day for remembrance of those who have gone before us, grant us inspiration to run with perseverance the race that is set before us. Keep us on the way of truth until we, too, join in endless celebration with all your saints in splendor. In the name of Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.

9 You remember our labour and toil, brothers and sisters; we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. 10 You are witnesses, and God also, how pure, upright, and blameless our conduct was towards you believers. 11 As you know, we dealt with each one of you like a father with his children, 12 urging and encouraging you and pleading that you should lead a life worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

13 We also constantly give thanks to God for this, that when you received the word of God that you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word but as what it really is, God's word, which is also at work in you believers.

Musical Interlude: Bring is Thy Loving Compassion Mark Thompson

The Message: "Cooperation"

As we approach the eve of the election of our elected leaders, I need you to work with me and each other as the church. With that request in hand you might be saying how can we do that, trust me, it can be done if we remain focused.

I don't know if you have ever been to a child's birthday party and watched the children as one child after another gets a swing of breaking open a pinata filled with candy and little toys, it is fun to watch how the children act when the pinata bursts open and the prizes rain down onto the ground.

Well, picture an experiment in which a couple of 3-year-olds face a challenge. They pull together on some ropes, and the result is a flood of gummy bears raining down. They are delighted by the candy treats.

But what happens when one gets more than the other?

A meltdown, a tantrum or a fight?

No. Surprisingly, they tend to make adjustments to arrive at an equitable distribution. If one points out that she is deprived of gummies, the other quickly corrects the imbalance.

A number of studies are pointing to the same conclusion: Human beings have a desire to cooperate. Despite what you see in halls of power around the world, people have an inborn desire to work jointly toward the same end.

Duke professor Michael Tomasello is an expert in this field, and he says that his research is revealing that "we want to cooperate because it's mutually beneficial to do so. But we also want to cooperate because we want to distribute the spoils of our joint effort fairly, because we ought to."

You might say that cooperation deepens the sense of "we" — the notion that we're all in this together, that we all deserve a share. Cooperation is a quality worth celebrating on All Saints' Day, when we remember the holy men and women who have worked together to continue the ministry and

mission of Jesus. In his first letter to the Thessalonians, the apostle Paul prayed that God would “so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints” (1 Thessalonians 3:13).

Paul’s first and second letters to the Thessalonians are possibly the earliest writings in the New Testament, so they give us a good idea of what was important to the first Christians. Written to Greek followers of Christ in the port city of Thessalonica, Paul spoke of the second “coming of the Lord” (4:15), which most members of the community assumed would happen in their lifetimes.

He also described how they should live a life that is pleasing to God, reminding them that “you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another; and indeed you do love all the brothers and sisters throughout Macedonia” (4:9-10). Love for one another and cooperation in the community were clearly a part of life in the Thessalonian church. He wanted them to have their hearts strengthened in “holiness” so that they would be “blameless” before God, and he desired that they be ready to meet “Jesus with all of his saints” (3:13).

Paul was talking about a circle of love, cooperation and holiness. Not a circular firing squad.

Such an approach made the Thessalonians ready to meet Jesus and his saints. They had a deep sense of the “we,” the idea that they were all in Christian mission and ministry together.

They lived by the Cooperation Imperative.

Paul and his colleagues, Silvanus and Timothy, set a good example for them. “We might have made demands as apostles of Christ,” wrote Paul. “But we were gentle among you, like a nurse tenderly caring for her own children” (2:7). Paul elevated the “we” over the “me,” not expecting an extra portion of praise or support.

If gummy bears had been available, he would have wanted to share them fairly.

“You remember our labor and toil, brothers and sisters,” Paul reminded them; “we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. You are witnesses, and God also, how pure, upright, and blameless our conduct was toward you believers. As you know, we dealt with each one of you like a father with his children, urging and encouraging you and pleading that you lead a life worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory” (2:9-12). Paul deserves his status as a saint of the church, working to proclaim the gospel and behaving in a pure, upright and blameless way. We should all be trying to provide this kind of service to the Christian community.

But here is a surprise: This kind of cooperation may actually be part of the way God has made us. More than 10 years ago, Michael Tomasello was running experiments with infants who were just beginning to walk and talk. “He had those infants engage with an adult stranger they had met moments before,” reports Duke Magazine. “They were put in situations where they

could help the adult solve some simple problem, from fetching out-of-reach objects to opening cabinet doors when the adult's hands are full. They were, as it turned out, eager to help." From a very early age, says Tomasello, they could understand the goals of another person and cooperate with them in a self-giving way.

The apostle Paul was eager to help the Thessalonians, which is certainly commendable. But maybe God had already instilled within him the Cooperation Imperative.

If we are going to "lead a life worthy of God," we are challenged to follow the path of Jesus and become the people that God made us to be. This means receiving the word of God, as the Thessalonians did, but also seeing that God's word is already at work in us. God wants us to cooperate with one another, and he sends this message through both Holy Scripture and through our bodies, hearts and minds.

Not surprisingly, our model for this is Jesus Christ, the One who was both fully human and fully God. He lived a life of cooperation, always elevating the "we" over the "me." In an article on Jesus and cooperation, Clive and Cara Beed argue that one of the major themes of Jesus was "collaboration between people who assist each other to achieve common goals."

First, Jesus cooperated with God. Even before his ministry began, he made clear that he was obedient to God and not to the devil. "One does not live by bread alone," he said during his temptation in the wilderness, "but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." Then he said, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test," and "worship the Lord your God, and serve only him" (Matthew 4:1-10).

Throughout his ministry, Jesus made clear that he was serving God and not himself. Instead of satisfying himself physically, spiritually or politically, he put God first. Jesus lived out the Lord's Prayer every step of the way, "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10). Collaboration with God was always his top priority.

Second, Jesus cooperated with people around him. He built a team at the very start of his ministry, calling 12 disciples to follow him and share in mission. In the Sermon on the Mount, he called for cooperation in the teaching we call the golden rule, saying: "In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets" (Matthew 7:12).

On the topic of forgiveness, Jesus challenged his followers to collaborate with God and with each other in this important work. "For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you," he predicted; "but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matthew 6:14-15).

Nothing, it seems, is to be done in isolation. The Cooperation Imperative.

Such collaboration continued when Jesus encountered 5,000 hungry people, and said to his disciples, "You give them something to eat" (Mark 6:37). Then he multiplied five loaves and two fish, filling the stomachs of everyone in the crowd.

When it came time for Jesus to send out 70 followers to do his work, he

commissioned them to “cure the sick” and say to them, “The kingdom of God has come near to you” (Luke 10:9). For Jesus, ministry and mission was not about him. It was all about collaboration, elevating the “we” over the “me.”

Our challenge is to cooperate with God and with each other, following the example of Jesus. This is what Paul, Silvanus and Timothy did among the Thessalonians, dealing with each of them “like a father with his children, urging and encouraging” them to lead a life worthy of God (1 Thessalonians 2:11-12). And when the Thessalonians accepted the message that was brought to them, they accepted it “not as a human word but what it really is, God’s word” (v. 13).

Cooperation with each other. Cooperation with God.

Both are imperative.

The challenge for churches today is to be solid at the center and soft at the edges. This means that they are devoted to the worship of the one Triune God — Father, Son and Holy Spirit — solid at the center of their preaching and teaching.

But at the same time, they should be soft at the edges, willing to collaborate with people of different faiths or no faith to serve a world in need. This could mean partnering with Muslims and Hindus to feed the hungry or starting a tutoring program with local university students to help at-risk neighborhood children.

When we are solid at the center and soft at the edges, we are in a good position to cooperate with God and the people around us, living “a life worthy of God” (v. 12).

Musical Interlude:

Strophe

Alexandre Guilmant

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.*

Loving God, we come to you in gratitude for your love, which is always present to us. In the stillness of these moments, we remember with thanksgiving the times in our lives when your love has enabled us to rise to our better selves. We thank you for the gift of your Son, who came that we might know what perfect love looks like.

We remember, too, the times when we have acted in anger rather than in love; we recall with remorse when our patience has been less than perfect and our behavior has been childish and surly. Forgive us for the occasions when we have loved things and used people and when we have failed to make love a priority in our lives.

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
Emma Pollice
Melanie Pouliot
Jackie Reiss
Martha Quinn
Del Sampson
Elwin Shepard
Ron Smith
Arlene Sirois
Diane Staples
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