



The Rolling Stone

Rollstone Congregational Church

December 2020

"IMAGES"

The month of December is a time to look back at the year and reflect upon what we have experienced, how we have grown, and what the future holds in store for the coming year. When we reflect there are images that ultimately come to mind. Some of the images are wonderful and some of them cause us to pause and look back.

This past year is leaving us with many different images than we have seen in the past years. Looking back we have images of loneliness, isolation, separation, illness, and determination to survive. There have been many plans and visits canceled or postponed. We have learned to remain connected through technology, computers, and telephones. It has been a difficult transition for some to meet family and friends this way. For others, work and school has been distant because of virtual learning and meetings. It has been a time to adapt and learn, resulting in new visual images. Not all of the images have been pleasant.

So, this year has left me with images of empty pews, zoom meetings, zoom virtual fellowship, and face masks. Nobody could have imagined that this was awaiting us when we gathered with family and friends last year. This year we have had family gatherings with no one present, we have had heartbreak when we had to say goodbye to family or friends who are no longer with us. There have been times when loved ones have gone to the doctors and hospital alone because nobody could be with them to offer support and comfort. We have images of Thanksgiving Day when all of the chairs are empty. These images bring a lot of heartbreak and despair.

But what will December hold for us? The images are the charts of another outbreak of the COVID-19 happening all around us. We have images of grandchildren being unable to be held and hugged by their grandparents. As we are aware there appears to be a vaccination that will be ready soon for distribution to help us move beyond this pandemic. If we listen to people in this Advent season we do not see the images that we should be focusing upon, images of Hope, Peace, Love, Joy, and the fulfillment of God's promise to send a Redeemer and Savior.

In this season of Advent, we need to hold onto the images of the manger with the Christ child coming into the world to give us hope. We should also be focusing upon the image of love shown not only by God, but by those friends and family that still pray for us daily and continually look inquire as to our current situation. We cannot say for sure when this will all pass, but we do know that God will not leave us alone or desolate to wander aimlessly without Hope.

Brothers and Sisters, this time will pass and we will be together again, until then remain strong in your faith, never losing hope like those who have no faith.

Peace,

Pastor Dave

Observations of a 2020 Poll Worker

It was the most remarkable election of my lifetime. All Americans, whether their candidate won or not, had to be impressed by the voter turnout and our country's passion to be heard. I had the privilege of serving as a poll worker for seven days during the early voting period at the City's Boulder Street offices and on Election Day for Ward 5 at Rollstone Congregational Church. Some days I had the opportunity to greet people at the door and answer questions. On other days I served on the check-in desk to verify registrations. One day I shared the serious business of tallying votes.

These observations are based on what I saw.

1. It appeared to me that the great majority of Fitchburg residents voted this time, whether by U.S. mail, by ballot drop box, or in person. Diversity was unmistakable. All ages, genders, races, and creeds walked into the voting places. Some came on walkers, in wheel chairs and with canes, or leaning heavily on others. Couples came holding hands. Young adults dashed in with groups of friends.
2. Many made it a family experience. Parents brought their children. Children also brought their parents, mostly acting as interpreters for those with little or poor English. I saw extended families taking selfies in front of the voting place.
3. There were quite a few first-time voters. Some of these were college students; some, recent immigrants; and, surprisingly, some were older and, for reasons only known to them, had never voted. One middle-aged gentleman, upon receiving his first-ever ballot, asked me to explain to him the process so he would not make a mistake.
4. Feedback on the early voting option was overwhelmingly favorable – both from the view of voters and poll workers. It allowed the workers a slower pace to relax and encourage voters. I will always remember the widest of smiles when individuals proudly watched their early voting packages (outer envelope and ballot) drop into their respective Ward containers.
5. Ballot counting was meticulous. The ballots were scrutinized at least five times before they were entered into the computerized data bank. Write-in candidates were tallied by hand and included. All of this was done under the watchful eye of City Clerk Mary de Alderete, who managed the city's voting process tirelessly and with a steady hand. At this writing votes are still being counted.

Thus, while we can take a deep breath that the greater part of the voting process is completed, we realize that the work of bringing our country together has only just begun. The nationwide voting result map is astonishing. Reasonable people, whether red or blue, cannot help but be shocked by the broadness of the divide. Now is the time to find ways to empathize with each other's differences and come together to be "great again" for all.

-Eileen Berger

Bulletin Bloopers

Worship Reminder: The congregation is asked to remain seated until after the recession.

Suggested by Pat Goguen

Jesus ...The Son of God

Matthew, Mark, Luke, John

In the Old Testament, there are not many instances when human beings met God face to face. One of the most memorable was when Elijah was on the holy mountain and he awaited God's presence. The prophet saw a hurricane, earthquake, and fire, but God was not present in any of them. Then he heard a gentle wind, and God was present in that breeze.

This appearance of God serves as a parable to understand better God's appearance as a man in the person of Jesus. For hundreds of years the Jewish people had awaited a Messiah of power, one who would help them destroy their enemies. They awaited a warrior Messiah, a kingly Messiah who would rule over all. When Jesus finally appeared, He deeply shocked them. He was not the warrior or the king as they expected Him to be. Rather He was that gentle breeze.

Jesus spoke of love and not vengeance. He became a servant rather than a ruler. He completely emptied Himself rather than demanding honor. As Jesus preached His message of reconciliation with God and among humans, He deeply offended those who had other expectations. To those who awaited a political solution to the problems of the Jewish people, He said that it was not really important who ruled their land as long as they served God.

There were those who were devoted to the law, but Jesus relativized its value telling them that the law was made for humans and not humans for the law. Those who wanted ritual purity were offended when He ate with public sinners. Jesus even offended His fellow citizens of Nazareth for they knew Him as He grew up, and they could not picture Him as being the Messiah.

Most of all, Jesus scandalized and astounded all Jews by intimating that He was one with God the Father. To all of those who would listen to His message, Jesus offered new life. He spoke of being reborn in the Spirit of God so that we would no longer live for ourselves or the world but would live for God instead. He healed, forgave, and even raised people from the dead.

For all this good that Jesus did, His own people had a hand in putting Him to death. Yet He would not allow this act of hate to defeat Him. By His death on the cross Jesus defeated sin, and by being risen from the dead He defeated even death. With his death and resurrection, He reversed the values of the world so that we could choose to die to ourselves to live with Him.

Most of all, Jesus promised that we would never be alone. He is with us until He returns in glory at the end of time.

1. Excerpt from the book: "Great People of the Bible" by Rev. Jude Winkler

Andy Lipasti

Notes from the Moderator:

Re-opening: All discussions on re-opening are on hold at this time. We have taken measures to be ready when the time comes, but at this time without a major break thru in the virus fight we will probably be looking again at reopening sometime in the spring. In the meantime, we will continue to operate via videos on the church's YouTube channel, information on our website & Facebook page and ZOOM meetings.

Christmas Plans: We have decorated the sanctuary and are in the process of taping Advent services. We are planning some special Christmas services including Christmas Eve. As part of these plans we are putting a special choir together to enhance our services with special seasonal music.

Stewardship: Please remember to consider your pledge to support our church during this stewardship season. Your financial support helps us keep providing services to our community.

Behind the scenes: Despite the limitations forced on us by the Covid-19 pandemic the leadership of the church has continued to work on several projects. These include a team working on a complete redesign of the church's financial management practices to allow a much simpler, more responsive system that in the future will make it easier for the Treasurer to handle the church's finances. We also have a group looking at re-writing the church's By-laws to bring them more in line with the realities of the church.

Website: We are using the church's website, www.Rollstone.org, to try to keep you up to date with what's happening with your church's community. Among other things on it are the latest news from the church, a calendar, links to all the Sunday services since last spring, the Rolling Stones from the last several years and many other items from or about our members.

Sunday morning coffee hours: Finally, please join us if you are able on Sunday mornings from 10:45 to noon on ZOOM to enjoy a conversation with members of the church. We have had participants from South America & England as well as the US!

Stay safe & stay in touch,

Paul Stansel, Moderator

WAYSIDE PULPIT

What Did I Say?

My brothers and I were playing a strategy game (probably Scrabble) with our second cousin, whom we hardly ever had seen, and didn't know well. She made a particularly effective play, and one of us complimented her on how well she had done. Far from appreciating the compliment, she lashed back in anger.

"Did you think you were playing with someone stupid?"

Nothing like that had remotely occurred to us, and we failed to understand how what we said had given offense.

In a discussion group on racism recently, we were struggling with the difficulty of making meaningful and civil conversation with others of different backgrounds, histories and perspectives than

our own. The maintenance of our separate perspectives makes it seem as if we are operating from completely different facts.

We seem to have entered into a moment in time when a profound reconciliation of the races in America seems about to take place. But a great deal of ground work still has to be done just to understand one another's terms of reference, hardened as they have been into very divergent world views on the basis of differing communal histories.

Please, God, may we succeed in doing this work, and not be prevented or dissuaded from pursuing it by those few on the fringes who would prefer that relations among us not be repaired.

Chuck Funk

From the Organ Bench....

Hey everyone!

I hope this finds you all well, happy, and healthy!

I am not sure if this will be making its way to you before Thanksgiving or after, so if it's before, I hope you have a nice Thanksgiving wherever it may be. If it is after, I hope you had a nice Thanksgiving! I am writing this at the same time I have a Chemistry report due, so I will make this one a bit shorter than normal (just this once!). So, please forgive me!

As always a few updates from the musical side of things:

- Please never hesitate to make music requests to either myself, Paul, or Pastor Dave! We want to hear from you!
- Stay tuned for our virtual Christmas Eve service! We are working hard to plan something a little more special for the occasion.
- On Christmas day, at some point (if there is not a blizzard!) I plan to ring out the bells marking the birth of our Lord. Some of you may just hear "the bells on Christmas day!"

Quick Organ Fact!

Did you know that wind that goes through the organ pipes is blown all the way up from the basement? Basically, a fan attached to a motor (imagine a small airplane turbine like device here) creates wind, which is then blown up through a pipe in the floor to the various wind reservoirs in the organ. Crazy, ain't it? The motor on the blower is 3.5hp, so it is the equivalent to a small push lawn mower. It's hard to imagine such a small blower powers an organ of that size!

Something to ponder.....

Normally, I would put a longer message here, but due to the fact I am cramming in this Chemistry report, I am going to make it quick!

I just want to remind everyone to be thinking about others this Holiday season. Those who don't have a home, those who don't have family or friends to share the holiday season with, and many who don't have money or food.

We are so fortunate to have what we have, and we take so much for granted. I'd just ask that you say a prayer for someone in need during this holiday season, and that we might be able to bring some peace to them through our prayers.

Alright, I am so sorry this was a short one. I promise the next one will be normal length! I hope you all have a blessed Christmas, and we will touch base in the New Year! You all continue to be in my prayers, and let's keep our fingers crossed we will be able to meet safely in our church building soon!

Till' we meet again, may God be with you!

Gavin



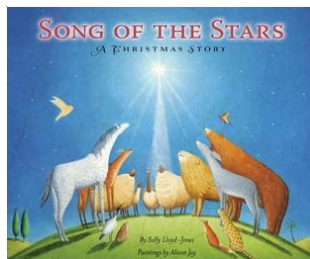
December-2020 --Words from the Church School --

The season of Advent is upon us and excitement is all around.

I am someone who loves to find yet another Christmas Story. It likely started when I began to teach Church School many years ago – perhaps in the early 1970's. The more stories I found the more I hoped to stumble upon new and different ones.

This Advent Season we cannot be together and it does not feel very good. But thankfully many of our members are keeping services, music, coffee hours, newsletters, and meetings going on behind the scenes. How can we be sad when we are part of such a wonderful Congregation?

I thought why not share a Christmas Story – perhaps a lesser known one...



This one is read for you by the author; Sally Lloyd-Jones.

While you listen, try to imagine being among the sweet animals, full of awe and anticipation...

[Song of the Stars - click this link to hear the story!](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sDr-pjusxig)

Blessings to ALL... until we are together again! Beth and Hal

PS – in case you want to know more...

Sally Lloyd-Jones talks about writing "Song of the Stars – A Christmas Story" – her childhood in Africa and how it shaped her writing...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sDr-pjusxig>

Christmas in Cuenca

By Vikki Pollice

I'd like to share our view of the holiday season here in Cuenca. It actually kicks off with the first weekend in November, although many stores start selling Christmas decorations around the end September and definitely in October.

The first weekend in November coincides with Halloween (a new celebration here), the Día de Difuntos or Day of the Dead, on November 2nd, and Tres de Noviembre on the 3rd. It is a 3 to 4-day long weekend and many people from the coast travel up to the sierra (the inter-Andean valley) as similar numbers travel from the sierra to the coast.

The Day of the Dead is celebrated by visiting family cemetery sites. In the larger cities, the government often provides various bands throughout the day and the visitors bring food and beverages as well as flowers to their departed loved ones. Children are always included. Among the special treats are guaguas de pan (bread babies) and a thick purple drink called colada morada. The guaguas (a kichwa word) are decorated and symbolize the new generation and the beverage symbolizes the past generation. It is not a sad day, but a day of joy in the connection of the generations. People picnic, play games and celebrate the life of the departed ones.

Tres de Noviembre is the celebration of the city of Cuenca's independence from Spain. This year Cuenca is celebrating its 200th anniversary. Mind you, the independence only lasted a couple of months before the Spanish retook the city, but it was a beginning. The 9th of October is the Independence Day of Guayaquil. There are other independence days in other major cities and then came the formation of Ecuador. Tres de Noviembre is such a big holiday because it combines other holidays with Independence Day. Traditionally, there is a huge crafts fair along the Tomebamba River. It probably runs for at least ½ mile along either side of the river. Aside from artisans from many different countries (including a few from Europe and Asia) there is a nice selection of food stalls and wagons to choose from. There is also live entertainment. The fair spreads to other areas of the historic city center.

This year the celebrations are quite different. For the Day of the Dead people were only allowed to visit the cemetery in small groups and the city determined the capacity of the cemetery and allowed only 30% in. Also, visitors were only permitted to stay for 20 or 30 minutes. Usually the visits are large family groups and full day celebrations. Also, temperatures were taken before entry, masks were necessary and social distancing by groups was enforced. Because of the attendance restrictions, it was necessary to register with the city for a time slot a week or so ahead.

The huge crafts fair was cancelled for Tres de Noviembre and any indoor or outdoor entertainments were restricted in size. I know the city was planning special things for the 200th holiday, but all the major entertainments were cancelled. Plays and concerts were limited in size and the city has attempted to set up small tours into the smaller surrounding towns. Cuenca still seems to have had an influx of Ecuadorian tourists up for the weekend.

As I said, Christmas decorations start to show up in the stores in October. This year, on November 6th, we were shopping in the big supermarket and they were playing Christmas songs (not carols) from the US. On the 9th one of the apartments in the building across the street put up and lit their Christmas tree. It's getting closer!

Of course, there are always city Christmas lights. The number of displays depends on the budget for the year and some of the displays move from place to place in the city. The following are pictures of the lights in the city, a couple of displays and the display along the Tomebamba River.



The first of the big Christmas celebrations takes place at the plazaleta in front of Santo Domingo. It is called the adoration of the Virgen Morenica de Rosario. It is held the first week in December and encompasses the entire intersection in front of the church as well the two streets. There are thousands

of candle-lit luminarias set in patterns. I think it's possible that there are as many luminarias as there are people attending. We were lucky that we know people who lived across the street from the church and were able to view the celebration from the 2nd floor. One year we "saw" it from the street and really it was impossible to see any of it. The Virgen is brought out to be viewed on the street after a Mass in the church. There is music and snacks and sooooo many people. Here are a few pictures of the event.



After this celebration, there are many local church events, many novenas and local parades organized by various church communities. Most churches and local "social clubs" plan to have an entry in the big Christmas Eve parade. These are photos of a local parade taken from our apartment.



The big parade is called the Paseo del Niño and is in honor of a statue of the Christ Child that was given to the Cuenca Diocese that the monseigneur took with him on a trip to the Holy Land and then to Rome where it was blessed by the Pope. For the past 60 years this parade has been held, but not this year. It draws between 100,000 and 150,000 people. Some are participants, some are just observers. The Christ Child has several different robes and the honor of carrying the Child from San Sebastian Plaza into the New Cathedral (a distance of 6 blocks) is bestowed on a different group of people each year. This year the parade will not be held because of Covid-19. Picture the density of the observers crowded onto

sidewalks maybe 4' wide for 6 blocks. Instead the diocese has decided to take the Niño through the various parishes in the city using the "Pope mobile" from Pope Francis' 2015 visit to Ecuador. They have also arranged with the army to helicopter the Niño over the entire city. The parade takes 8 or more hours to pass assuming one stays in one place and can stand for that long. There are vendors of little toys and snacks as well as one family that has been making chicha, an alcoholic drink, that is passed out for free. Most viewers don't stay for the whole parade. They shop in the stores that line the street and watch off and on, or they wander off to get something to eat like ice cream or a cold drink. Remember it is summer here for Christmas and if sunny, it is very warm. The lineup of participants is probably more than a mile long. There are floats, decorated cars and pick-up trucks, groups of walkers (many of whom perform traditional dances for the viewers), adults and children on horseback in traditional Indigenous or Spanish costume. It is just as long as the Macy's Thanksgiving parade and far more culturally varied. The day ends with the Rooster Mass or midnight mass.

The following photos are of the parade from other years.



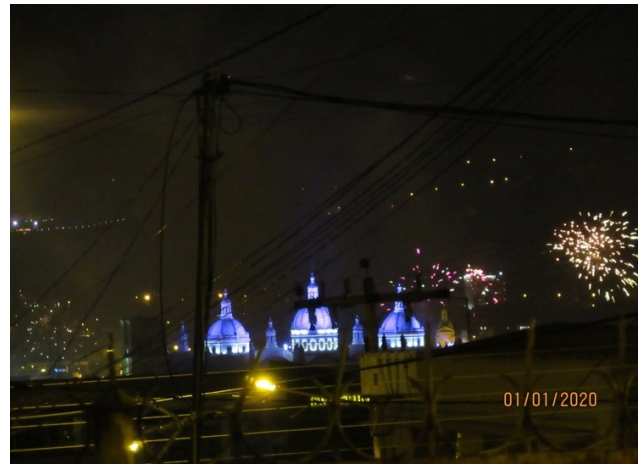


While the parade is going on, there are those who are preparing the Christmas Eve dinner. This is very family oriented and aside from eating, this is when presents are exchanged. Dinner is served, if it is early, at 10PM, but can be anywhere from that time to after midnight. We've been blessed to be invited to 2 Christmas Eve dinners. The first was at the home of the grandmother-in-law of our lawyer. It was a huge affair with many aunts and uncles, cousins and other family members and more food that I've ever seen. They are Spanish descent on both sides of the family. The second dinner was with the family of a former colleague of Gary's and his family. They are probably Mestizo, a mixture of Spanish and Indigenous. This was just a gathering of parents and their children and their immediate families – and us. It was much less formal, much more homey.

Usually Christmas Day is a quiet one. It is a day of attending Mass and possibly with a small gathering of immediate family for dinner.

There is a lull during Christmas and New Year's Eve. On New Year's Eve there are parties or family gatherings, but from about 10:30pm to 1:30am there are fireworks everywhere. These are displayed by families, partygoers, various organizations, restaurants, hotels—just everyone. It's truly amazing since fireworks are legal here for all. The dogs don't appreciate it very much. There are also "globos" or lanterns released into the sky and the burning of manigotes in the streets. Manigotes are dummies many times with political faces attached. There is a custom of jumping over the manigote, but one never knows if there are fireworks in them. More than one person is seriously burned on New Year's Eve especially considering the area exposed to the flames or fireworks.

These photos are from New Year's Eve last year. You can see a burning manigote and fireworks over the Cathedral. Please excuse the telephone poles and wiring cutting through the photo.



The Christmas season ends on Three Kings Day with another big parade (which has also been cancelled for this year) in a different area of the city. This one tends to make fun of political figures. We've only seen photos and videos of this one. It is on the other side of the city and we've usually been packing to travel to one of Gary's advising assignments. There are prizes awarded for best of several categories.

And then the events move into pre-Lent activities, but that is another story.