



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

Third Sunday after Epiphany

January 24, 2021

Prelude:

The Lord, My God is with us

Claren

Let Us Rejoice as We Worship:

We yearn to be in the presence of the Holy One,
To linger in the house of prayer,
To walk beside still streams,
To behold the radiance of creation,
To sing as matches our joy,
To offer our sacrifice of service,
To dwell all our days enfolded in the love of God,
To praise God with our deeds and melodies.

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.

Opening Hymn:

“Take Up Thy Cross”

“Take up thy cross,” the Savior said,
“if you wouldst my disciple be;
deny thyself, the world forsake,
and humbly follow after me.”

Take up thy cross; let not its weight
fill thy weak spirit with alarm;
His strength shall bear thy spirit up
and brace thy heart and nerve thine arm.

Take up thy cross, heed not the shame,
nor let thy foolish pride rebel;
thy Lord for thee the cross endured,
to save thy soul from death and hell.

Take up thy cross and follow Christ,
nor think till death to lay it down;
for only those who bear the cross
may hope to wear the glorious crown.

A Reading from the Scriptures:

Mark 1:14-20 (NIV)

14 Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, 15and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.’

16 As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake—for they were fishermen. 17And Jesus said to them, ‘Follow me and I will make you fish for people.’ 18And immediately they left their nets and followed him. 19As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. 20Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

Musical Interlude:

Psalm 29

Bexfield

The Message:

“A Good Disciple Is One Who Leaves”

There are five people in a large room who are brought together for different reasons. It may sound like the start of one of those jokes about people gathering, but their chance encounter is no joke and hopefully their story will change your life and choices regarding discipleship.

At a hospital in Galveston, Texas, a Filipino nurse named Rosalie was working the night shift. One of her patients was a 92-year-old engineer with a broken arm. Another was an 82-year-old man with renal disease. The third patient was only 52, but diabetes had caused him to lose his left foot.

The diabetic had been a Baptist preacher in an African American church, along with running a car-detailing business. But then his disease began to rule his life. He took only a portion of his insulin, telling Rosalie that he knew his body best. “I’ll let the doctor know,” she said with a smile, wanting to avoid an argument.

He softened a bit and told her that he would try to be a model patient. “Your job is hard enough,” he said. “You don’t need someone acting the fool.”

Then things got busy with a diaper change for the engineer, instructions for the man with renal disease, and a shot for the diabetic. On top of this, a new patient arrived, a Mexican who spoke limited English. Since Rosalie had once thought of becoming a nun, she made a connection with him over the fact that they were both Catholic. Later in the shift, Rosalie and the diabetic preacher talked about the book of Job.

“Because of his faith,” said the man, “God rewarded him double.”

“God is just,” Rosalie agreed.

“Whatever his will,” said the diabetic, “I accept it.”

All through the night, Rosalie worked hard, caring for her patients, and then she “went out into the sun-scrubbed morning with a satisfied yawn.” In a book on Rosalie, journalist Jason DeParle writes about how “Celtic pilgrims talk of ‘thin places’ where the distance between heaven and earth narrows and the presence of God is more readily felt. Rosalie, the almost nun, worked in a thin place.”

This is Rosalie’s story: Rosalie was a quiet child and an average student

who considered religious life in Manila — not necessarily someone you'd pick to make it through nursing school, move to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates for several years, and take and retake English-language tests until, after 20 years of working, she could obtain a visa to the United States, take on a night shift in a Galveston hospital and embrace suburban life. ...

"A Good Provider Is One Who Leaves" has political implications without being an overtly political work. Yes, DeParle's sympathies are clear. "Rosalie's experience was a triple win: good for her, good for America, and good for her family in the Philippines," he writes. "Migration was her vehicle of salvation. It delivered her from the living conditions of the nineteenth century. It respected her talent, rewarded her sweat, and enlarged her capacity for giving."

DeParle's book is called: *A Good Provider Is One Who Leaves: One Family and Migration in the 21st Century*. In it, he follows Rosalie and her family over the course of 30 years. Members of the family migrate around the world in search of work, then send money back to their relatives in the Philippines.

DeParle says, "the money that migrants send back to their families is three times the world's foreign-aid budgets combined. Migration is the world's largest self-help program, the world's largest anti-poverty program. It's hugely important to the people who are relying on the money they get for education, for health care, for food, for shelter." Because of this, a common Filipino expression — "A good provider is one who leaves" — became the title of a book.

That's surprising, isn't it? Normally we think of good providers as people who stick around. But in a world of global migration, a good provider is one who leaves.

The very same is true of disciples. At the beginning of the gospel of Mark, Jesus was walking along the Sea of Galilee, and there he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea. Jesus said to these two fishermen, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people" (Mark 1:16-17).

What did they do? Mark says that "immediately they left their nets and followed him" (1:18). They left their nets and presumably their families as well. Although the Bible does not say anything about wives for these men, Mark tells us that Simon had a mother-in-law (1:30). Where there is a mother-in-law, there is usually a wife.

Then Jesus saw James and John, the sons of Zebedee. They were also fishermen, sitting in their boat and mending their nets. Immediately, Jesus called them, and they "left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him" (1:20).

A good disciple is one who leaves.

The original followers of Jesus created problems when they took off. After all, fishing was a family business, and Zebedee could not have been happy to be left holding the nets. Simon had a house in Capernaum, which he shared with family members that included Andrew and Simon's mother-in-law, at the very least. With Simon and Andrew on the road with Jesus, who was paying the bills?

The 12 disciples may have sent money home, as Filipino nurses do from around the world. But there is no biblical evidence that they did so. In fact, Luke tells us that a group of women provided for Jesus and the disciples "out of their resources" (8:3).

The disciples simply left. And Jesus was proud of them for doing so.

So, what does it mean to be a good disciple today? We may not be challenged to quit fishing and follow Jesus, but still we are supposed to leave. This means abandoning what we know and walking with Jesus in a new direction.

A good disciple is one who leaves the workplace to serve. Many of you spend a great deal of time on the job, laboring in ways that provide income for yourself and your family. Such effort is beneficial, but watch out that your job does not take over your life.

“How’s your work-life balance?” That’s a question asked by a career guru named Jenny Ungless. She points out that the “pace of our lives today, and the fact that modern technology means we’re always contactable, can make it very difficult to ‘switch off’ from work.” If work takes up all of our time and energy, we are going to resent it instead of enjoying it.

Jesus calls us to switch off, leave the workplace, and serve. This might mean tutoring an at-risk kid. Teaching English as a second language. Swinging a hammer for Habitat for Humanity. Putting a few hours a week into serving others will give you a sense of satisfaction that you cannot find at work. Service brings us closer to Jesus, who said that he “came not to be served but to serve” (Mark 10:45).

A good disciple is also one who leaves the comfortable for the uncomfortable. At Fairfax Presbyterian Church in Virginia, a group of men and women leave the United States and travel to Honduras for week-long mission trips. Although the plane flight from Washington, D.C. to San Pedro Sula is no longer than a flight to Los Angeles, the group members feel as though they are traveling to another world.

In Honduras, the roads are covered with potholes and cooking fires fill the air with smoke. Extreme poverty is everywhere, with squatters living in shanties by the side of the road. When members of the church group serve in medical clinics, they find that care is delivered with love but is outdated by a generation. When members do construction at a youth camp, they discover that good tools and supplies are hard to find. Home Depot or Lowe’s is not just around the corner.

And yet, leaving the United States for Honduras is worth the discomfort. The joy of the Honduran people is infectious, and their faith in the face of daily hardships is inspiring. Strong bonds have developed over nearly two decades of visits, linking Americans and Hondurans in deep and loving friendships. For some members of Fairfax Presbyterian, an uncomfortable week in Honduras is the best week of the year.

Finally, a good disciple is one who leaves the familiar for the unfamiliar. In the United States today, people are seeking out like-minded friends and neighbors, and the result is terrible political polarization. “Americans are increasingly segregating themselves by political party and ideology even in their residential communities,” says Greater Good Magazine. “This segregation makes us more likely to demonize each other, as more and more people live alongside people who hold similar political beliefs to them.”

A good disciple is one who leaves the familiar and seeks connections with people who do not share their race, religion, political party or ideology. Such a person understands that Jesus did not begin his ministry by talking only with like-minded Galileans. Instead, he and his disciples immediately faced “a man with an unclean spirit” (1:23). Then Jesus “cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons” (1:34). And instead of staying at home, Jesus said, “Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim

the message there also” (1:38).

Jesus and his disciples did not remain in familiar places with like-minded people. Instead, they moved into new areas and did the work of helping, healing, teaching and preaching. Yes, they had difficult confrontations, which is to be expected when lines are crossed. But disagreements are natural and healthy, while polarization is not. Greater Good Magazine reports that polarization has a long list of negative effects. Our families are being undermined, we are less likely to help each other, we are more stressed out, violence is more likely, and it is becoming harder and harder for us to solve problems.

Disciples are going to have to make sacrifices and face hardships, like migrants who travel the world in search of work. But a willingness to leave the workplace, leave the comfortable, and leave the familiar can have a powerful and positive impact. When we reach out to others, we discover that the words of Jesus are true: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near” (1:15).

Just ask Rosalie. On the wall of her Texas house, she has a 6-foot crucifix that proclaims Jesus the “Redeemer” and “King of Kings.” She has a nurse’s prayer for a “compassionate heart” that she passes each day as she leaves her house and goes to work at the hospital.

A good disciple is one who leaves. Are you ready to heed the call to leave and serve? May God protect and guide you as you respond to that call to leave. Amen.

MUSICAL REFLECTION “Lord You Have Come to the Seashore”

Lord, you have come to the seashore,
neither searching for the rich nor the wise,
desiring only that I should follow.

(Refrain)

O, Lord, with your eyes set upon me,
gently smiling, you have spoken my name;
all I longed for I have found by the water,
at your side, I will seek other shores.

Lord, see my goods, my possessions;
in my boat you find no power, no wealth.
Will you accept, then, my nets and labour?

O, Lord, with your eyes set upon me,
gently smiling, you have spoken my name;
all I longed for I have found by the water,
at your side, I will seek other shores.

Lord, take my hands and direct them.
Help me spend myself in seeking the lost,
returning love for the love you gave me.

O, Lord, with your eyes set upon me,
gently smiling, you have spoken my name;
all I longed for I have found by the water,
at your side, I will seek other shores.

Lord, as I drift on the waters,
be the resting place of my restless heart,
my life's companion, my friend and refuge.

O, Lord, with your eyes set upon me,
gently smiling, you have spoken my name;
all I longed for I have found by the water,
at your side, I will seek other shores.
at your side, I will seek other shores.

Musical Interlude:

Benedictus

Bexfield

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.*

As we enter into this time of prayer, O God, we offer our gratitude that you are always present to us. Instill in us a desire to so listen to others. Help us to listen with open hearts and open minds, that others might feel safe in our presence. Instill in us a spirit of serenity that others might feel accepted in your nonjudgmental grace. Free us from the tendency to label people and ideas and allow us instead to lean into mercy and kindness.

In the stillness of these moments, we acknowledge the times when we have been less than kind, merciful and open. Thank you for never banning us from your presence, loving God; help us to so love and accept others.

O God, we offer our thanks for the abundant life that is ours. We thank you for our church and for our church family. We thank you for those who gather here, and for those who are unable to be with us for this time of worship. We offer our gratitude for all the choices that are ours. We thank you that we can choose where we live, what we eat and where we worship. So forgive us, gracious God, for the times when we have complained about these things. Keep us mindful of those who have no house to call their own and for those who do not know where their next meal is coming from. Help us to revel in our many alternatives rather than complain about many decisions. Open our eyes and open our hearts to those who are struggling with the business of going on. Help those who find themselves in a muddle without hope to hang on to the promise that morning comes, and that, someday, the morning will bring joy. Grant us the patience to sit with others in their quandaries and pain. Help us to understand those who are not in a place to embrace life with joy. We offer our prayers in the name of Jesus, who always hears

our cries for help and who taught us to pray to you 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:

“Lord, Speak to Me”

Lord, speak to me that I may speak
In living echoes of your tone.
As you have sought, so let me seek
Your erring children, lost and lone.

Oh, lead us, Lord, that I may lead
The wand’ring and the wav’ring feet.
Oh, feed me, Lord, that I may feed
Your hungry ones with manna sweet.

Oh, teach me, Lord, that I may teach
The precious truths which you impart.
And wing my words that they may reach
The hidden depths of many a heart.

Oh, fill me with your fullness, Lord,
Until my very hearts o’erflows
In kindling thought and glowing word,
Your love to tell, your praise to show.

Oh, use me, Lord, use ever me,
Just as you will, and when, and where
Until your blessed face I see,
Your rest, your joy, your glory share.

Benediction:

We are called to be witnesses to God’s glory. God urges us, encourages us, pleads with us to take this call seriously — to live a life worthy of God. Jesus is our model and ideal, and also our savior and hope. When we fall short, it is the Spirit who supplies all our needs. Go from this place, committed to be witnesses to God, disciples of Christ and a community of the Spirit, through the power of the triune God. Amen.

Postlude:

Trumpet Tune in D Major

Johann Klingsman

PRAYER LIST

Amy Belli
Carolyn Barney
Jack Brigham
Becky Colwell
Maureen Daoust
Rebecca Driscoll
David Dufour
Diana Escarbie
Cathy Fontaine
Chuck Funk
Bob and Pat Goguen
John Hanks, Jr.
Linda Hurd
Family of Mary Jackson
Tom Kazanjian
Sarah Kee
Colin Lajoie
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
Diane Staples
Carter Stansel
Kaitlin Stansel
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 Governmental Leaders