



# 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

# *Sixth Sunday after Epiphany*

## **February 14, 2021**

**Prelude:**                                 **Down to the River to Pray**

**Let Us Rejoice as We Worship:**

Today is a time to Celebrate and Feast for our Lenten Journey is coming upon us. Today is a time to remember that God calls each of us to come and find joy. Today is a time to fling open wide the doors of our sanctuary and our hearts to welcome in those who might be strangers so that they may journey with us. Today is a time to laugh and dance, celebrating God's presence with us. Today we place our faith and trust in God as we are led from this moment until we experience the promise of new life on Easter morning. Come and join in the fulfillment of God's great plan for our salvation. Let us celebrate today and always the God who faithful, merciful, and just. Come, let us worship!

**A Time of Prayer:**

Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation, for it is from you and your goodness that we have this day to gather and celebrate as we prepare for the Season of Lent and Reflection.

In but a few days we will begin our Lenten journey as a time of fasting and sacrifice. Today however we celebrate and feast for the abundance of the gifts that you have given to us. We thank you for not only the materials gifts we share, we offer thanks for the gifts of the Spirit and each other. You have called us to be one with you, celebrating our diversity and the unique gifts we bring to share.

In our sharing and feasting we are aware of those who are less fortunate than us and who struggle to find joy in their existence. May we share our gifts and ourselves as we continue to pledge our generosity to those who are often excluded for joining in the celebration.

Prepare us for the Season of Lent, tasting the fullness of that which we have today with the experience of living in times where we are hungering. Bless our ministry so that we may supply spiritual food that will bring sustenance in times of want and plenty. Bless us as we prepare for this journey with Jesus the Christ. Amen.

**Opening Hymn:**                                 **“We Are Walking”**

We are walking in the light of God,  
We are walking in the light of God,  
We are walking in the light of God,  
We are walking in the light of,  
The light of God,  
We are walking, walking,

We are walking, walking,  
We are walking in the light of,  
The light of God,  
We are walking, walking,  
We are walking, walking,  
We are walking in the light of God

We are singing in the light of God,  
We are singing in the light of God,  
We are singing in the light of God,  
We are singing in the light of,  
The light of God,  
We are singing, singing,  
We are singing, singing,  
We are singing in the light of,  
The light of God,  
We are singing, singing,  
We are singing, singing,  
We are singing in the light of God.

We are dancing in the light of God,  
We are dancing in the light of God,  
We are dancing in the light of God,  
We are dancing in the light of,  
The light of God,  
We are dancing, dancing,  
We are dancing, dancing,  
We are dancing in the light of,  
The light of God,  
We are dancing, dancing,  
We are dancing, dancing,  
We are dancing in the light of God.

### **Readings from the Scriptures:**

**Mark 1:4-11 (NIV)**

4John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. 6Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. 7He proclaimed, 'The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. 8I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.'

9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. 11And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'

**Mark 9:2-9 (NIV)**

2 Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, 3and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. 4And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. 5Then Peter said to Jesus, ‘Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.’ 6He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. 7Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, ‘This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!’ 8Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.

9 As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

**Musical Interlude:                      Love Goes On                      Bernadette Farrell**

**The Message:                      “Celebrating the Face of Good News”**

“Donatella Versace was the face of Givenchy’s fall/winter in their 2015 campaign.”

“Demi Lovato was the face of mental health in new campaign.”

“Dylann Roof was the face of terrorism Americans should fear most.”

“LeBron James continues to be the ‘face’ of the NBA, but who is next?”

These four cultural assertions are taken from actual headlines that appeared in various media over the past few years. You may not recognize all the names, but the headlines suggest that you soon will. Versace is an Italian fashion designer. Lovato is a 30-year-old actress and singer. Roof is the young man who walked into a South Carolina church, sat in a Bible study for a while, and then murdered nine of the black people participating on an evening 6 years ago.

These headlines suggest that the mere face of a well-known person can represent a campaign, an organization or even concepts and ideas.

When we see iconic images, we associate them with ideas. Here are some possibilities:

- Einstein is the face of Science
- Rosa Parks is the face of Civil Disobedience
- MLK is the face of Civil Rights
- Queen Elizabeth ... the United Kingdom
- Lady Gaga ... Pop Culture

- Abraham Lincoln ... Freedom
- Shakespeare ... Literature
- Sigmund Freud ... Psychology
- Beethoven ... Music
- Elvis ... Rock 'n' Roll
- Meryl Streep or Tom Hanks... Movies or Acting

Can you think of others?

Actually, yes. Moses. Moses is the face of “the law.”

Anyone else?

Yes. Elijah. Elijah is the face of “the prophets.”

If we saw Elvis in a room talking to Einstein, we might say, “Rock ‘n roll meets science.”

If we saw Freud chatting with Miley Cyrus, we might say, “Psychology trying to understand pop culture.”

If we saw Moses chatting with Elijah, we could say, “The law and the prophets compare notes.”

If both of them were talking to Jesus, we might say, “The law and the prophets listen to the gospel.”

And this brings us to a mountaintop of Transfiguration Sunday where Peter, James and John are witnesses to a sort of divine event or encounter.

(Elijah and Moses: The law and prophets)

Today is Transfiguration Sunday. On the mountain of the transfiguration, we see three people assembled. These are iconic figures, if you will: Moses, Elijah and Jesus.

Thanks to movies like Exodus: Gods and Kings, DreamWorks’ animated The Prince of Egypt, Cecil B. DeMille’s The Ten Commandments and even Mel Brooks’ History of the World: Part I, (Moses, speaking to the Israelites: “The Lord, the Lord Jehovah has given unto you these fifteen ... [drops one of the tablets] Oy! Ten! Ten commandments for all to obey!), many of us have a working -- although it may be a bit distorted -- knowledge of Moses.

We know he met God in a burning bush, parted the Red Sea and led the people

through the wilderness. We may even understand how being known as the face of the law makes sense, because he is the one who received the 15, or ... 10, commandments from God.

Elijah, on the other hand, may be a bit less well-known. He is not the author of an Old Testament book like Isaiah or Jeremiah. We come to know of him by reading 1 and 2 Kings.

Elijah arrives on the scene when Israel's kings compromised the faith for political expediency. He speaks for God tirelessly, calling the people and their leaders away from worship of the pagan god Baal, and back to worship of the one, true God.

When God tells him a drought is coming because of the people's unfaithfulness, Elijah announces it to the people. During the drought, God miraculously saves Elijah through the faithfulness of a widow.

He challenged the prophets of Baal, asking them to have their god send fire down to consume their sacrifice. After a long time trying without success, the prophets of Baal concede defeat.

Then Elijah prepares his sacrifice, which includes dousing the sacrifice, the wood and stones with three applications of water -- so much water that it overflowed into trenches.

Then Elijah prayed and God answered. Fire came down and consumed the sacrificial bull and the wood. It turned the stones of the altar to dust, and caused the water in the trenches to evaporate into a mist. Whoa!

No prophet in Israel had produced -- at God's insistence -- that kind of a sound and light show. Elijah risked his life and reputation to speak for God. Yes, he feared for his life regularly, as God's message was not always well-received. Twice he fled out of town. Each time he seemed doomed, God met him in a wonderful, powerful way.

What Moses and Elijah have in common is a very special relationship with God.

For example, while Moses was leading the people through the wilderness, he had a moment of discouragement. He asks for a sign of God's power, to see God's glory. God grants him what he can. In a beautiful passage, God passes by Moses allowing him to see God's back, or maybe better translated, where God had just been.

Elijah, rather famously, has a similar encounter. While he hid in a cave, God came to Elijah, not in fire, earthquake, or a mighty wind, but in the still, small voice of calm.

The face of the law, Moses, and the face of the prophets, Elijah, -- the two who have come closest to seeing God -- are right here on "Transfiguration Mountain" talking to Jesus, the face of the good news. And it is all recorded in today's gospel lesson.

Now, let's take a closer look at the concepts Moses and Elijah represent. When we talk about them, we think of the law, we often think of things that are restrictive, that

keep us from doing what we want to do. But laws are necessary. They help us relate to one another, and to be the people God has called us to be.

Anyone who has ever sat through the anarchy of a traffic jam, and prayed for the police to show up, knows how helpful laws can be. Or, whenever we go shopping at one of those after-Thanksgiving Black Friday sales where people are pushing and shoving for a deal, we long for some law and order.

Every government in the history of humankind has had some system of law. Without law, there's anarchy. No society has been born and survived without the rule of law. The type of government or economic system is not relevant. Democracy, monarchy, oligarchy, totalitarian, communism, fascism, socialism, capitalism ... laws. Everywhere. Laws.

Even when we're having fun, playing games! Arrggh! Rules! Laws! Want to play golf? Rules! Basketball? Rules! Every game has rules! We can't even have FUN without having laws!

So, are you surprised that in the kingdom of God, that in God's country, we run headlong into rules, regulations, obligations and at least 15 commandments?

But, like most laws, these laws are in place for our long-term benefit. They show us how to live together and serve one another.

Moses is the face of the laws and rules of God.

In the speaking of the prophets, we must be careful about the interpretation and understanding of what a prophet does. Contrary to popular thinking, prophets did not necessarily predict the future. Prophets received special revelations from God for the good of the people, and were called to share it. Elijah's predominant message from God was to encourage the people of Israel to return to God and stop worshiping Baal.

In the old biblical days the duties of the prophet and the priest in Old Testament times: The former spoke to humans on behalf of God; the latter spoke to God on behalf of humans.

So God had the ear of the prophets and told them what to say to the people of God. Some prophets had distinctive messages, and some had distinctive ministries. Many of the prophets, acting as a mouthpiece for God, called the people to repentance. Some called the people of God to lift up the downtrodden, and to ease the burden of the oppressed. Some called upon the people of God to return to the worship of the true God, and to rebuild the house of worship.

Now, some Christians today think they're God-appointed arbiters of the Rules and Regulations Concerning those Who Claim to be Christians. Some churches got more rules than you can shake a stick at.

And some Christians, claiming to be the mouth of God, go on television to prophesy about the end of the world, the Antichrist and the true meaning of the book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ. Usually, it has something to do with the Old

Testament book of Daniel!

The prophetic nature of the prophet was to declare God's people the need for them to repent so that they might be delivered.

In Jesus Christ, the third person on the mountain of the transfiguration, we have a perfect response to the law and the prophets, and that response is called: Good news! Gospel!

Moses, the face of the law, is on the mountain with Jesus. So is Elijah, the face of the prophets. They are there with Jesus, the face of the gospel.

We've met Moses.

We've met Elijah.

That is, we know the law. We know we fail miserably to keep it.

We've heard the prophet. We know we're called to holiness. We know we've failed miserably to live righteously as we should.

Now we meet Jesus.

He kept the law of God -- perfectly.

He lived a life of holiness -- perfectly.

And -- the good part, is that God has agreed to accept his perfection on our behalf.

Now, we are "free from the law" ("O happy condition [old hymn]), and free from religious obligations. This does not mean we're lawless or have no obligations. Even Jesus said that he did not come to destroy the law. No, because someone has kept the law for us when we could not keep it ourselves, we are able to serve to follow Jesus and serve God motivated by love and thanksgiving.

That's Jesus, the face of the gospel, the face of good news. The law and the prophets have been fulfilled in Christ who calls us to a new life in him.

We will soon begin a Lenten journey toward the cross. Perhaps Jesus' conversation with Moses and Elijah was about this very journey.

In this story of the transfiguration, the face of the law and the face of the prophets meet the one who is the face of the good news.

In Jesus, the law and prophets come together, and we are set free, that is the good news that the gospels reveal. Through Jesus we are set free. Amen.

**Musical Interlude:**

**Prelude on Amazing Grace**

**Anderson**



**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.*

Most gracious God: For your choice of one people among the world's peoples for the revealing of yourself and of your will for human life, we praise you. Through Moses, you gave your people the Law. Through your prophets, you charged them so to live by your Law that their lives might be a guiding light for all the nations.

In your own good time, O God, you moved to reveal yourself firsthand, fully, in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. We give you thanks for the cherished stories which surround his birth, particularly for the story of that bright and wondrous star that guided wise men from far away to his side. With them, we hail the light of your love, for your creation and for us, which shone from that little boy and would shine with dazzling radiance from the adult he grew up to be.

On this holy day, we praise you for expanding your circle of witnesses to include, beyond his people, all those who find in him the Light of the World; for creating, out of his sacrificial death and resurrection, a new people, a worldwide community of his disciples, his ecumenical church. We pray for the church; for that strange, richly diverse company of women and men who have found in your divine Son a fresh start for human history and an unquenchable source of light.

Help us, O God, to let his light shine from us that we may be sources of light for others who stumble about in ignorance, anxiety, self-destructive passion, hatred or any other form of darkness. Grant that we may serve as messengers of your grace for loved ones and friends whose lives have been darkened by illness or who are at this very time walking through the valley of the shadow of death.

And now as we offer our praise to you O God, hear our prayer that we were taught 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 Medley:**

#### **"When the Saints Go Marching/Down By the Riverside"**

O when the saints go marching in,  
O when the saints go marching in,  
O Lord, I want to be in that number  
when the saints go marching in.

O when the sun refused to shine,  
O when the sun refused to shine,  
O Lord, I want to be in that number  
when the sun refused to shine.

O when they crown him Lord of all,  
O when they crown him Lord of all,  
O Lord, I want to be in that number  
when they crown him Lord of all.

O when they gather round the throne,  
O when they gather round the throne,  
O Lord, I want to be in that number  
when they gather round the throne.

I'm gonna lay down my burden, down by the riverside,  
Down by the riverside, down by the riverside  
I'm gonna lay down my burden, down by the riverside,  
I'm gonna study war no more.  
I ain't a gonna study war no more, I ain't a gonna study war no more  
I ain't a gonna study war no more, I ain't a gonna study war no more  
I ain't a gonna study war no more, I ain't a gonna study war no more.

Well, I'm gonna put on my long white robe, Down by the riverside  
Down by the riverside, down by the riverside  
I'm gonna put on my long white robe, Down by the riverside  
I'm gonna study war no more.  
I ain't a gonna study war no more, I ain't a gonna study war no more  
I ain't a gonna study war no more, I ain't a gonna study war no more  
I ain't a gonna study war no more, I ain't a gonna study war no more.

Well, I'm gonna lay down my sword and shield, Down by the riverside  
Down by the riverside, down by the riverside  
I'm gonna lay down my sword and shield, Down by the riverside  
I'm gonna study war no more.  
I ain't a gonna study war no more, I ain't a gonna study war no more  
I ain't a gonna study war no more, I ain't a gonna study war no more  
I ain't a gonna study war no more, I ain't a gonna study war no more.

### **Benediction:**

We have spent this hour together in the presence of our Holy God. As you depart, remember that you are the face of Jesus to everyone you encounter. Live and love as he would. And may the world be changed because they have met Jesus face-to-face. Amen.

**Postlude:**

**Benedicamus Domino**

**Christopher Uhlein OSB**

**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  
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  
Family of Martha Quinn  
Del Sampson  
Elwin Shepard  
Ron Smith  
Diane Staples  
Carole Ann Sumner and Henry  
Donna Thorne  
Daniel Tousignant  
Marilyn Wales

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