



# 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

# *Second Sunday of Lent*

## **February 28, 2021**

**Prelude:**

**Antiphon**

**Gordon Young**

### **Focusing on the Lenten Journey:**

Come along Brothers and Sisters as sojourners in faith. Bring along a sense of expectancy, a vision of high hopes, a glimpse of future possibility, a vivid imagination. For God's creation is not done. Join together as we are called to pioneer a new future with God. Celebrate as we venture forward, let us leave behind our desires for a no-risk life, of worldly accumulations, and of certainty.

In this Season of Lent let us travel light in the spirit of faith with an expectation toward the God of our hopes and dreams. So let us come along together as sojourners in faith, knowing that God goes with us and that God is here now!

### **A Time of Prayer:(Based on Hosea 10:12-13)**

O, Lord, we come to you as a people so desperately in need of your unfailing love. Break up our souls' unplowed ground, for it is time to seek the face of your Son, Jesus, until he comes and showers righteousness upon all who love and obey him. We pray that we would no longer become victims of the enemy's lies, nor eat the fruit of deception, having depended on our own strength. In sowing repentance, we lay claim upon your covenant that we would indeed reap the fruit of unfailing love. For your blessings, O Lord, are showered upon all people, who in loyalty proclaim the name of your beloved Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen.

### **Opening Hymn:**

#### **“Spirit of Faith, Come Down”**

Spirit of faith, come down, reveal the things of God,  
and make to us the Godhead known, and witness with the blood.  
‘Tis thine the blood to apply and give us eyes to see,  
who did for every sinner die hath surely died for me.

No one can truly say that Jesus is the Lord,  
unless thou take the veil away and breathe the living Word.  
Then, only then, we feel our interest in his blood,  
and cry with joy unspeakable, “Thou art my Lord, my God!”

O that the world might know the all atoning Lamb!  
Spirit of faith, descend and show the virtue of his name;  
the grace which all may find, the saving power, impart,  
and testify to humankind, and speak in every heart.

Inspire the living faith (which who-e'er receive,  
the witness in themselves they have and consciously believe),  
the faith that conquers all, and doth the mountain move,  
and saves who-e'er on Jesus call, and perfects them in love.

### **A Reading from the Scriptures:**

**Romans 4:13-25 (NIV)**

13 For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith. 14 If it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. 15 For the law brings wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there violation.

16 For this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (for he is the father of all of us, 17 as it is written, 'I have made you the father of many nations')—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. 18 Hoping against hope, he believed that he would become 'the father of many nations', according to what was said, 'So numerous shall your descendants be.' 19 He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was already as good as dead (for he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. 20 No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, 21 being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. 22 Therefore his faith 'was reckoned to him as righteousness.' 23 Now the words, 'it was reckoned to him', were written not for his sake alone, 24 but for ours also. It will be reckoned to us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, 25 who was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification.

### **Musical Interlude:**

**Prelude**

**JB Lully**

**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](mailto: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.*

God of glory, we praise you for your presence in our lives and for all goodness that you shower upon us in Jesus Christ. Especially we praise and thank you for promises kept and hope for tomorrow, the enjoyment of friends, the joy of families, the wonders of your creation, those who have gone before us, love from our parents, sisters and brothers, love from our spouse and children, our faith and the church.

God of grace, remind us that we are all your children for we are brothers and

sisters of Jesus Christ. We offer our prayers for whom you love. Especially we pray for those we too often forget, people who have lost hope, those who mourn this day, those who suffer because of war, those who are lonely or sick, those who go hungry.

God of healing, come now to us with new strength to renew our grieving spirits. Help us to look into the future with confidence and assurance in Christ's comforting love. Fill us with a faith that will sustain us during difficult and trying times as we await for that time that we shall meet with the living Christ. And now we pray to you that prayer which Jesus taught us to pray 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."

**Musical Interlude:**

**Choral**

**JS Bach**

**The Message:**

**"Abraham the Adalatherium"**

This is a story about a "crazy beast."

Sixty-six million years ago, a mammal called an Adalatherium, lived in the Southern Hemisphere. Paleontologists are excited about it because it helps fill some gaps in the evolution of mammals. Found on the island country of Madagascar, this critter is an important ancient ancestor, one who walked the Earth in the time of the dinosaurs.

The fossil is a "game-changer," according to paleontologist Patrick M. O'Connor. Its official name is "Adalatherium," which literally means "crazy beast." But what is so crazy about it? Its forelimbs sit close together, like kitten legs. The hind legs are splayed like a bodybuilder's squat. The animal had ever-growing front teeth and weird back teeth that look like they arrived from outer space. Its skull is unique, with a mysterious hole above its snout. That's a strange fusion of odd traits, isn't it? No wonder it is called "crazy beast."

Adalatherium is special because it is unusual, and also because it is so rare. Paleontologists who studied the site found 20,000 dinosaurs, frogs and crocodiles. Can you guess how many mammals they uncovered? Only 12.

None were as special as the crazy beast.

In his letter to the Romans, Paul describes our ancient ancestor Abraham as a game-changer in the evolution of our faith. No, he wasn't a man with kitten legs, weird back teeth, and a skull with a mysterious hole. But he surprised everyone by focusing on faith instead of religious law. Paul tells us that God's promise "did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith" (Romans 4:13). This focus on faith was completely unexpected in the ancient world of Abraham, Sarah and their descendants.

When you take a look at Abraham, you see that he was saved by his faith.

His trust in God was what made him right with God, and Paul says that his faith “was reckoned to him as righteousness” (4:22). In a world of spiritual dinosaurs, Abraham filled an important gap in the evolution of the people of God, from ancient Hebrews to modern Christians. He showed evidence of a strong and saving faith.

Yes, he might have been an Adalatherium, but there was nothing crazy about him.

So, what happens when we act as religious paleontologists and do a little digging, in both the New Testament and the Old? Paul’s letter to the Romans was written to a community he had never visited, and it contains a clear and compelling definition of the gospel. Paul says that the gospel “is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith ... For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, ‘The one who is righteous will live by faith’” (1:16-17). At the heart of Paul’s understanding of the gospel is faith, nothing more and nothing less. In fact, he uses the word four times in these two verses.

But Paul was not the first in his evolutionary tree to focus on faith. No, he quotes the prophet Habakkuk when he speaks of the saving power of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Having grown up a Jew, Paul knew the line from Habakkuk, which says, “Look at the proud! Their spirit is not right in them, but the righteous live by their faith” (2:4). Paleontologists are always looking for connections, and here Paul makes a connection with his spiritual ancestor Habakkuk, the prophet who understood that our spirits are not right until we live by faith.

Then, in the fourth chapter of his letter to the Romans, Paul digs deeper into the power of faith by lifting up the example of Abraham, the one who “believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness” (4:3). Paul knew that for thousands of years, the term “righteousness” had been associated with adhering to a moral code based in the law of God, as in “the righteous hate falsehood” (Proverbs 13:5), “the thoughts of the righteous are just” (Proverbs 12:5), and “the desire of the righteous ends only in good” (Proverbs 11:23).

But Paul had come to see that “there is no one who is righteous, not even one” (Romans 3:10). Looking inward, he confessed, “I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do” (7:18-19). Sin was making him crazy, and he needed a new way to be reckoned as righteous. In place of good works and perfect adherence to the law, he needed a fresh approach to becoming right with God.

Fortunately, he found it in the faith of Abraham. For Paul, this was the missing link in his spiritual evolution. He asked the Romans, “What then are we to say was gained by Abraham, our ancestor according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God” (4:1-2). But instead of receiving credit for good works, “Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness” (4:3).

When Paul wrote this, he was not inventing something new. In fact, he was doing some digging of his own, and he found the line in Genesis that says that Abraham “believed the Lord; and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness” (15:6). The key was that Abraham believed the Lord. That’s what justified him, making him right with God. You never know what you are going to find when

you go digging around an ancient site full of dinosaurs, frogs and crocodiles. Paul read the book of Genesis and discovered that it was Abraham's faith that made him righteous, not his works.

Abraham the Adalatherium became right with God through faith. That's a game-changer.

In a similar manner, Paul discovered that Abraham received God's promises through "the righteousness of faith"; previously, everyone had assumed that promises came "through the law" (4:13). But now, the promises of God for a new and better future are available to everyone who believes. Our challenge is simply to trust the God, "who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist" (4:17). This is good news for all of us, because it means that righteousness can be gained by all who "share the faith of Abraham" (4:16), even if we are not able to follow God's law to the letter.

For Christians, sharing the faith of Abraham includes having faith in Jesus Christ. This was true for the apostle Paul, and for all of his descendants in the Christian Church. The Protestant reformer Martin Luther was like Paul in that he struggled with his sinfulness. He wanted to be a good and righteous person, so he confessed his sins frequently, often daily, and for as long as six hours at a time. But after confessing his sins, he would leave the church and remember other sins that he needed to confess. This frustrated him, and he realized that he could not become righteous by human effort alone.

Then, Luther read the line in Paul's letter to the Romans that says, "the one who is righteous will live by faith" (1:17). In a flash, Luther realized that he was not made righteous by his good efforts, but by his faith in Jesus Christ. "I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise," said Luther. "This passage of Paul became to me a gate to heaven."

The Reformation began when Luther made this discovery about the role of faith in making us right with God. "If you have true faith that Christ is your Savior," he said, "then at once you have a gracious God, [and] you should see pure grace and overflowing love." Luther was inspired to preach the gospel, a word that means "good news," because he saw that the gospel was the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith.

Faith was a game-changer for Abraham, Paul and Martin Luther. It was the missing link that made them right with God, and it can do the very same for us. Faith is a willingness to trust God and Jesus, and to walk behind them on the path of life. Abraham put this kind of trust in God, and he "did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was already as good as dead," said Paul, "or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb" (4:19). Instead, Abraham trusted God to be the one "who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist" (4:17). Sure enough, God did what was promised, and made Abraham "the father of many nations" (4:17).

When we have this kind of faith, we are made right with God — both now and eternally. There is nothing crazy about it. Faith is the biggest game-changer in Christian history, making us right with God through our faith in Jesus Christ.

Such faith means that we can trust God to work through us, even when our bodies fail us. It means we can trust Jesus to lead us, even when we wander through a thicket of difficult moral choices. It means we can trust the Holy Spirit to uplift us, even when we disappoint ourselves and others. Being



**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  
The Staples Family  
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 Governmental Leaders