



# 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

# *Fourth Sunday of Lent*

## **March 14, 2021**

**Prelude:**

**Londonderry Air**

**Flor Peeters**

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

We are all God's work of art, each a precious gem, a marvelous tapestry, a potters delight. We are God's handiwork, reborn in Christ Jesus to be a blessing, every one of us, woven together in love, shaped with infinite compassion, painted with incredible beauty.

We are God's creation, all of us, touched by grace, saved by faith and beckoned to praise.

Let us now join together in celebrating God's creation in this world and in all who inhabit this place.

### **A Time of Prayer:**

God of majesty who creates an eye-catching sunset, who carves out a Grand Canyon, who stuns us with giant sequoia trees, we gather in awe, in wonder, in silent adoration, for you are great and marvelous. Yet you would have us worship you more for your love than for your greatness, more for your care than for your majesty. You sent Jesus because you loved us so very much. Sunsets and mountains and oceans lead us to your door, but Jesus takes us to your heart. Because of Jesus we know you want us to be whole, to stand tall, to reach out to others in need.

This day is filled with your wonder and your tender care. You set a table before us and invite us to be fed. You send your Spirit to accompany the words of Scripture and sermon so that words become a source of life. You place us in a community that shares tears and joy, struggles and hopes. You cause the ocean to praise you with ever-flowing waves.

Hear our prayers, those heart-deep and beyond words. Hear our yearnings and our worries. In Jesus' name. Amen.

### **Opening Hymn: "O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing"**

**Azmon C.M.**

O, for a thousand tongues to sing  
My great Redeemer's praise,  
The glories of my God and King,  
The triumphs of His grace!

My gracious Master and my God,  
Assist me to proclaim,  
To spread through all the earth abroad,  
The honors of Thy name.

Jesus! the name that charms our fears,  
That bids our sorrows cease—  
'Tis music in the sinner's ears,  
'Tis life, and health, and peace.

He breaks the pow'r of canceled sin,  
He sets the pris'ner free;  
His blood can make the foulest clean,  
His blood availed for me.

He speaks, and, list'ning to His voice,  
New life the dead receive,  
The mournful, broken hearts rejoice,  
The humble poor believe.

Glory to God, and praise and love  
Be ever, ever giv'n  
By saints below and saints above,  
The church in earth and heav'n.

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

**Ephesians 2:1-10 (NIV)**

2You were dead through the trespasses and sins 2in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. 3All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else. 4But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us seven when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— 6and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus. 8For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God— 9not the result of works, so that no one may boast. 10For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

#### **Musical Interlude:**

**Brother James's Air**

**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 grace, we come to this house of worship and place of prayer with thanksgiving. We come into your presence with gratitude, that you may hear our prayers.

Help us when we struggle to carry the cross of Christ faithfully this Lenten season. For those who tread on ground that is rocky with instability in their homes or jobs, we ask for your calming presence. For those who cannot find their way in the quagmire of grief and loss, we ask for the light of the Lord to guide them on the journey. For those who are ill or providing care for them, we ask for the peaceful serenity of the Holy Spirit. For those who feel abandoned because they have taken a stand for what is right, we ask for the assurance of your love.

Holy God, center us in the journey toward the Cross. At the sights and sounds of Christ's journey toward Jerusalem, may we remember that we, too, must find our way to a new understanding of sacrifice for the sake of love for others. Lead us not into the temptation of excuses, of definitions that keep us distant from your purpose. May we come to know that quiet joy of love, burning deep within us, that calls forth a desire to give ourselves for your world, like Christ did. Forgive us our distractions, heal our wounds, give us courage for this journey, not only to the Cross, but also beyond - to your new life for all peoples. May your grace sustain us when we encounter the rough roads of this journey, giving us the reassurance of your presence with us.

We know, O God, that to carry the cross is a commitment to a way of life; we try to carry the cross proudly. But sometimes we falter. Help us in our travels that we might walk steadfast and sure to Jerusalem -- and beyond. And now we pray our solemn prayer which Jesus 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."

**Musical Interlude:**

**No. 2 from 12 Irish Suites**

**Flor Peeters**

**The Message:**

**"Being Moved"**

There are constant indications and thus we've heard that many people relocated because of the Covid-19 pandemic, and it turns out there's actually some truth to the rumors. In July, the Pew Research Center released findings of a study it conducted, and its headline told the tale: "About a fifth of U.S. adults moved due to Covid-19 or know someone who did."

When you get down into the study's statistics, however, much of the moving seems to have been by young adults, a fairly mobile demographic at any given time. While some moves were to flee areas with high infection risks, other moves

were caused by the pandemic only indirectly. For example, a young adult might have moved back home because his or her college dorm closed to prevent virus spread, or a restaurant worker moved because his or her job went away when the eateries/restaurants/ pubs/bars were forced to shut down.

Nonetheless, there does seem to have been some increased migration among other adults who, for one reason or another, decided that last summer was the right time to change locations. Some moves were by people with the financial resources and job flexibility to pick up and move to a place that was not a virus hotspot. Others were even forced out of their housing because they could no longer afford their rent.

But demographers say that people generally move for life-stage reasons — because of things happening internally in their lives — so some of the relocating may have had little or nothing to do with the virus.

One colleague and his wife moved back closer to family in August — for family and retirement reasons — and in the process, learned that they were part of a boom. The real estate agent they contacted to sell the home they were leaving said there was a housing shortage because of so many people moving — or wanting to. They listed their home in late June and the very next day, they received an offer that was \$3,000 above their asking price. They accepted the offer and had to phone several moving companies before finding one available to truck their household stuff to their new location. Movers told them that booking a truck was hard right then because many more people than usual were relocating.

Moves driven by the virus have skewed the numbers, but many people are still moving for the typical reasons.

The major theme of our reading from Ephesians is the grace of God, but included in the text are a couple of statements about moving:

“... even when we were dead through our trespasses, God made us alive together with Christ”

“God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. ...”

The words of scripture have an otherworldly ring to them, and if we don’t stop to think about them, we may assume they are about eternal life.

But the death and life to which they refer is about what today we sometimes call “conversion,” and the movement implied in “raised us up with Christ and seated us with him” is moving from an earthbound perspective on life to a heaven-inspired one. And one reason we’re sure that Paul was not speaking of a life-after-death experience here is because he concluded this passage by saying, “For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life”.

Still, being “seated” with Jesus in “heavenly places” doesn’t sound much like the usual experience of daily life. But Paul is presumably using the vaunted language of exaltation to convey the idea of looking at our lives from above, from God’s presence, and being motivated in our daily actions by that perspective.

Saint Ignatius of Loyola, the 16th-century priest who founded the Jesuits, developed a process of spiritual discernment for Christians who wanted to learn what God intended for them. An important principle of that process is this: “The



love which moves me and makes me choose something has to descend from above, from the love of God.” To seek God’s will and be moved by God’s love is what this verse is speaking of.

The writer of First John speaks of this kind of motivation using different words: “God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them ... We love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:16, 19).

The idea of moving serves as a metaphor for this because it doesn’t come naturally to most of us to choose our daily activities and responses to others based on what we think God wants of us. To get there, we need to make a conscious effort, something akin to the effort required to move our household to a new place.

In speaking of moving, consider the story William Barclay, the Scottish author and radio host who tells when commenting on this text. The story, it’s about a woman in Edinburgh, Scotland, who lived in a dingy, cellar apartment. She was a member of a congregation where the Reverend Doctor George Matheson came as the pastor. Matheson had gone blind at a young age while studying for the ministry, but he continued into the ministry and became known for the power of his preaching. The practice in that church was for elders in the congregation to take communion around to members at various times in the year, but the elder who was assigned to take the elements to this woman found the cellar where she had been living empty. When he finally tracked her down, he found her living in an attic that was as light and airy as the cellar had been dark, and he commented on the difference. “I see you changed your house,” he said. She responded “I have. You can’t hear George Matheson preach and live in a cellar.” The grace of God had elevated her view of life — like being seated in the heavenly places.

We might assume that living that way would get easier as we get more in the habit of seeking and doing God’s will. But that isn’t necessarily the case. My colleague has relocated several times over his career, and he tells us that the task has become more work with each successive move. The first one, when he was newly married and they had little stuff, was accomplished using just their car and the vehicle of a friend. As children came along, so did more stuff, and now, with a lifetime accumulation of things, more effort was required — including dealing with underwriters for a mortgage, having a move-out deadline that didn’t mesh with the move-in availability of the destination home, and getting a truck scheduled around all that. Those of you who have moved recently will no doubt have your own stories of the challenges involved. Being one that has made a few moves and preparing for another one, it does get more and more difficult as we are faced with the reality that the things we accumulate over the years are now baggage rather than treasures which bog you down.

Trying to look at life from a heaven-inspired perspective — moving our viewpoint and then acting accordingly — doesn’t necessarily get easier, even as we make it our regular practice. We are dragging more and more of life behind us as we move along — the joys and pleasures, the disappointments and sorrows, the doubts and worries — and the voice of God, which initially seemed to have spoken to us so plainly, sometimes seems inexplicably silent. But that doesn’t necessarily mean we’ve somehow failed, but rather God wants us to walk by faith.

One of the odd things about moving this year is that if you’d done so in hope of lessening your exposure to Covid-19, the move may have been an exercise in futility. The word pandemic, of course, refers to how widespread the risk of exposure is. You can’t completely run from a pandemic. Likewise, even

as religious conversion or commitment to follow Jesus has moved us, in the words of our text, to be “raised ... up with Christ and seated ... with him,” that relocation does not ensure that we’ll always have a clear word from God.

Nonetheless, the love and grace of God already received compels us to goodness, to a desire to do his will. The move that Paul describes as being seated with Christ in heavenly places helps us to better please God and do the good works that God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

May we be willing to live that way. Amen.

### **Closing Hymn:**

### **“Now Thank We All Our God”**

### **Nun Danket**

Now thank we all our God,  
with heart and hands and voices,  
who wondrous things hath done,  
in whom his world rejoices;  
who from our mother’s arms  
hath blessed us on our way  
with countless gifts of love,  
and still is ours today.

O may this bounteous God  
through all our life be near us,  
with ever-joyful hearts  
and blessed peace to cheer us;  
and keep us in his grace,  
and guide us when perplexed,  
and free us from all ills  
in this world and the next.  
All praise and thanks to God  
the Father now be given,  
the Son, and Holy Ghost,  
supreme in highest heaven,  
the one eternal God,  
whom earth and heaven adore;  
for thus it was, is now,  
and shall be evermore.

### **Benediction:**

As we go forth from this place on our Lenten journey, let us be mindful that the cross of Christ calls us to rise to our greater selves. Pick up the cross, my friends, and follow faithfully this week in the footsteps of the one who has gone before: the one who is, who was and who forever shall be, Christ our Lord. Amen.

### **Postlude:**

### **St Patrick’s Breastplate**

## **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