

---

# Working



# Together

---

## **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 Easter*

## **April 11, 2021**

### **Prelude:**

### **Gathering Words of Promise:**

This is the good news which we proclaim to you.  
Jesus Christ is raised from the dead!  
Walk in the light of his love.  
Live in the light of his teachings and healing mercies.  
Come, let us worship the One who overcame death.  
Let us celebrate the triumph of our Lord. Amen.

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

Oh Lord, search our hearts and reveal that which is questionable in your sight. Often, we hide true intentions behind stubborn silence as well as outward works displayed in your name. Yet our motives are displeasing to you who knows us better than we know ourselves. Cultivate the sweetness of Jesus so that we would discern when to stand firm as well as when to yield. That we would embody the sense of community that our Lord Jesus sought to share through his life and deeds. Help us to grasp its essence more clearly, thereby wrapping all fundamentalism within the fine richness of agape love freely poured out for all.

### **Opening Hymn:      “In Christ There is No East or West”      McKee**

In Christ there is no east or west,  
in him no south or north,  
but one community of love  
throughout the whole wide earth.

In Christ shall true hearts ev'rywhere  
their high communion find;  
his service is the golden cord,  
close binding humankind.

Join hands, disciples of the faith,  
whate'er your race may be;  
all children of the living God  
are surely kin to me.

In Christ now meet both east and west,  
in him meet south and north:  
all loving hearts are one in him  
throughout the whole wide earth.

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

**Acts 4:32-35 (NIV)**

32 Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. 33 With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. 34 There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. 35 They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

## **Musical Interlude:**

## **Prelude in G**

**Moore**

**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 who moves in mysteries, you have overcome the power of death. With your resurrection power, you work to conquer all that threatens your plan for abundant life. In Christ's resurrection, we see the beginning of the end of the things we fear most. Even if we do not always sense it now, we trust that the end will come to all powers you call your enemies.

We pray for an end to the power of hunger, both in our hearts and in the lives of those who long for food ...

We long for you to overcome the power of violence, in families and communities around the world ...

We hope for a day when no one shall rule tyrannically, when all power shall be exercised according to your love and justice ...

Holy Spirit, let us know the power of resurrection today! Let us proclaim the risen Christ in all of our lives, as we witness your work to overcome all of your earthly enemies. In the name of our risen Lord, who taught us to pray 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:**

## **O Son's and Daughters**

## The Message:

## “The Power of Crowd-sourcing”

First-century Christians of Jerusalem worked together to help those in need. “There was not a needy person among them,” because they distributed aid “to each as any had need” (vv. 34-35). Having been rescued by Jesus and given new life by his resurrection, we — like those Christians of Jerusalem — can best reach out to those in need when we work together.

You’ve heard of families being rescued from burning buildings. Sailors being rescued at sea. Cats being rescued from trees. Dogs being called “rescues” when they are pulled out of abusive homes.

But have you ever heard of food rescue?

Food is rescued when it is taken out of grocery stores, restaurants, gas stations and hospitals. The food has not gone bad, but for a variety of reasons it cannot be used. Unless it is rescued, it will be thrown in the trash.

In Virginia, organizations such as Prince William Food Rescue will rescue food and deliver it to churches, community centers, senior centers, mobile home parks and schools. Volunteers are notified of available food through a mobile app called “Food Rescue Hero.” They quickly step into action, pick up the food, and deliver it to where it is needed.

“We have a great team,” says a food rescue leader to InsideNova. “Together we are changing the food insecurity landscape here in the Prince William County region.” They have been successful in reducing food waste and food insecurity, he says, “because of the tremendous people involved.”

The program is growing because donor locations, rescues, and downloads of the Food Rescue Hero app are increasing weekly. In just six months, the Prince William group delivered more than 200,000 pounds of food, which translates into over 100,000 meals.

That’s what happens when you mobilize a group of committed volunteers to rescue food. No one person is the hero, but instead success comes through crowd-sourcing.

Such efforts go far beyond Prince William County. In at least seven cities, Food Rescue Hero is making a positive difference by diverting food from trash cans to hungry people. Over the course of five years, more than 12 million pounds of food has been rescued by over 10,000 volunteers. Now, in addition to delivering fresh food, Food Rescue Hero will transport low-income people to their medical appointments. According to Fast Company magazine, this Pittsburgh-based non-profit has become a crowd-sourced transport network, moving both food and people.

“Technology is important,” says one of the founders of Food Rescue Hero, “but it’s the power of collective action that will drive massive change.”

What’s true today was true in first-century Jerusalem. The book of Acts tells us that “the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common” (4:32). A great team. Tremendous people. Instead of individual heroism, collective action.

“With great power,” says Acts, “the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. . . . as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold.

They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need" (vv. 33-35). The result of this action was that there "was not a needy person among them" (v. 34).

These Christians had been rescued by Jesus, so they wanted to rescue others. With great power, the apostles spoke of the resurrection, and great grace was upon them all. In all that they did, they had one heart and soul.

In today's society we may call it Crowd-sourced Christianity.

In our society today we need to tap into this power if the church is going to feed the hungry, assist the poor, and give testimony to the resurrection of Jesus. For too long, Christians have read this passage from Acts and said, "That sounds like socialism or communism. We can't do that!" But what about collective action that leads to Crowd-sourced Christianity? Such an approach is foundational to our faith, and well within our abilities.

"We need Christians focusing on ordinary Christianity," writes pastor Tony Merida. This means "speaking up for the voiceless, caring for the single mom or dad, restoring the broken, bearing burdens, welcoming the functionally fatherless, and speaking the good news to people on a regular basis in order to change the world."

Merida is right to say that ordinary Christianity is the most important kind of Christianity. Start with the great commandment, he says: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Reach out to those in need, feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, visit the prisoner, speak good news to people around you.

This was the ordinary Christianity being practiced by the first followers of Jesus in Jerusalem, not as isolated heroes but as members of a unified community. They were Crowd-sourced Christians who tackled their challenges through collective action, just as we should be doing today.

So, how do we do this? There are a few steps that we can follow.

What do we do when we see or can identify a need?

Shane Claiborne has written a book called *The Irresistible Revolution: Living as an Ordinary Radical*. There's that word "ordinary" again — ordinary Christian, ordinary radical. In the book, he tells the story of two college buddies who told him they were going to Philadelphia to hang out with their "homeless friends." He teamed up with them, and, at first, he was afraid he would be robbed. But in the end, he says, the people in the alleys "stole only my heart." One day, he heard about a group of 40 homeless families who were about to be evicted from an abandoned cathedral in North Philadelphia. He joined a group that went to help them, and they became known as the YACHT Club, which stood for "Youth Against Complacency and Homelessness Today."

Their YACHT Club was not for boaters, but sometimes boaters would call them. Shane and his friends would explain their work and ask for a donation.

Shane saw a need: Shelter for homeless families. He responded through the YACHT Club ... a Crowd-sourced Christian effort. We might not have this exact situation in our community, but the first step is always to see or identify a need. There are plenty of needs right before our very eyes and as a faith community we are called to respond.

Once we identify the need we need to move into action that will "Meet a Need"

In 1997, Shane and a group of friends moved into a small row house in a poor section of Philadelphia. Their vision was to love God, love people, and follow

Jesus, and they began calling their little experiment the “Simple Way.” Since then, they have shared food with folks who need it and run a community store out of their house. They have reclaimed abandoned lots and planted gardens in the concrete jungle. They have rehabbed abandoned houses and made friends with people in prison and on death row. Shane and his friends have seen a vision of another way to live — the Christian way. It is a form of Crowd-sourced Christianity, directed toward changing the world for the better.

You don’t have to move into inner-city Philly to meet a need, but you do have to take collective action. You can show up as a group at city council meetings and speak in favor of affordable housing. You can volunteer to serve a meal once a month at a homeless shelter. You can join a group that offers after-school tutoring for at-risk children. You can join a prison ministry and offer Bible studies for inmates. The work of rescuing takes many forms, but it is always best done as a group. This is the one time that we are interested in group action rather than the “Lone Ranger Syndrome.” There is power when working in numbers.

Like the early Christians we need to work together to Change the World  
The Christians of Jerusalem had been rescued by Jesus, so they wanted to rescue others. They “gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus” and shared their resources with such generosity that there “was not a needy person among them” (vv. 33-34). They became part of a movement called “the Way” (9:2), which took their lives in a new direction. “No wonder the early Christian church was known as the Way,” writes Claiborne. “It was a way of life that stood in glaring contrast to the world. Of course, everyone was forewarned that in this kingdom everything is backward and upside-down — the last are first and the first are last, the poor are blessed and the mighty are cast from their thrones.”

The Christian Way still stands in contrast to the world. Instead of “me first,” it is “us first.” Instead of “hate your enemy,” it is “love your enemies” (Matthew 5:43-44). Instead of “store up treasures on earth,” it is “store up treasures in heaven” (Matthew 6:19-20).

In the Crowd-sourced Christianity of first-century Jerusalem, Christians worked together to help those in need. Rather than the church being split into liberals and conservatives, “the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul” (Acts 4:32). Possessions were not hoarded, but instead “everything they owned was held in common” (v. 32). Rather than the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer, “there was not a needy person among them,” because they pooled their resources and distributed aid “to each as any had need” (vv. 34-35).

We are still part of this movement called the Way, one that takes our lives in a new direction. Having been rescued by Jesus and given new life by his resurrection, we can see a need, meet a need, and change the world. And like the Christians of Jerusalem, we do this best when we work together and practice Crowd-sourced Christianity.

**Closing Hymn:**

**“O Church of God, United”**

**Ellacombe**

O Church of God, united to serve one common Lord,  
proclaim to all one message, with hearts in glad accord.  
Christ ever goes before us; we follow day by day  
with strong and eager footsteps along the upward way.

From every land and nation the ordered ranks appear;  
to serve one valiant leader they come from far and near.  
They chant their one confession, they praise one living Lord,  
and place their sure dependence upon his saving word.

Though creeds and tongues may differ, they speak, O Christ, of thee;  
and in thy loving spirit we shall one people be.  
Lord, may our faithful service and singleness of aim  
proclaim to all the power of thy redeeming name.

May thy great prayer be answered that we may all be one,  
close bound, by love united in thee, God's blessed Son:  
to bring a single witness, to make the pathway bright,  
that souls which grope in darkness may find the one true light.

*Words © 1954, Ren. 1982 The Hymn Society (admin. Hope Publishing Company, 380 S Main Pl, Carol Stream, IL 60188)*

### **Benediction:**

God loves you and sends you out into the world to share the Good News of God's love. Be, therefore, agents of change, mediators of reconciliation, heralds of good news. Amen.

**Postlude:**

**Grand Choeur**

**Theodore Salome**

---

### **PRAYER LIST**

Jacob Allen - Deployed/Middle East

Amy Belli

Carolyn Barney

Jack Brigham

Becky Colwell

Maureen Daoust

David Dufour

Diana Escarbie

Robert Fitton

Cathy Fontaine

Bob and Pat Goguen

Linda Haas

Douglas Hanks

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

Melanie Pouliot

Jackie Reiss

Del Sampson

Elwin Shepard

Amanda Sicard

Ron Smith

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