

Lakewood Congregational Church,

A Congregation of the United Church of Christ

Sunday, March 15, 2020

An Order of Worship to be followed in your home,
along with our worship video or on your own
Preferably at 10:00 a.m.



Welcome and Announcements

When you begin your in-home worship service, pause to center yourself and then hold your palms towards the computer screen or to your heart and imagine the energy of connection. Think of many of the people you love at Lakewood Congregational Church, and feel their hearts connected to yours.

Say, “Good morning! May the Peace of Christ be with you.”

We are taking many steps to guide our community in this anxious time. Our current steps include:

- Many conversations between Lakewood churches, Lakewood City School District, and Lakewood Community Services Center regarding social services. We are waiting to understand the need and our role within it, but we are currently very connected within those conversations and will remain so.
- Rachel created forms to match people up with caregiver needs. There is one for people who need childcare and one for people who will offer childcare. Rachel is handling these conversations.
- We are hosting Facebook Live opportunities for prayer and chit-chat. This will likely continue to evolve. If you are not already on our Facebook page, now is the time to connect in that way.
- Diaconate is coordinating phone calls and other check-ins. You will hear more about that moving forward.

Offering and Contribution Collection

This service will not include a set-aside time of offering, so we want to remind you now that we do hope that you will continue to fulfill your pledges during this time. Financial gifts are always welcome, and our church feels the call to respond to the needs around us as they arise. Financial stability allows us to do so more effectively. So, let us give generously of our time, talent, treasure to further the work of God in our community.

You can do so in the following ways:

- Writing and mailing a check to Lakewood Congregational Church, 1375 W. Clifton Blvd. Lakewood, Ohio 44107
- Texting STEWARD to 44-321
- Sending a gift through your bank’s online bill pay
- Call the church office at (216) 221-9555 to discuss other options

Let us worship God.

Prelude

Lord, I Need You by Matt Maher

Performed by Chris Burns

Call to Worship (Based on Psalm 95)

One: O come, let us sing to our GOD;

let us make a joyful noise to the Rock of our salvation!

Many: Let us come into God's presence with thanksgiving,
singing joyful songs of praise!

One: Our God is great, Sovereign above all powers and principalities.

Many: The sea, the depths of the earth, the heights of the mountains,
indeed all of creation were made by God and belong to God.

One: O come, let us worship and bow down,
let us kneel before the HOLY ONE, our Maker!

Many: Yes! God is our God, and we are God's people:
O that today we would listen for the Lord's voice!

One: Let us not harden our hearts, as they did in the wilderness,

Many: When our ancestors tested our Liberator,
requiring proof of God's faithfulness,
even though they had witnessed miracles!

One: For forty years God contended with that generation and said,
"They are a people whose hearts go astray, and they do not regard my Ways."

Many: Today, Holy One, we have learned from their struggles.

Today, we re-dedicate our hearts to you
and strain our ears to hear your voice.

Speak now, Still-Speaking God, for your people are listening!

Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing

Sing along or listen in your home

1 Come, thou fount of every blessing,
tune my heart to sing thy grace;
streams of mercy never ceasing
call for songs of loudest praise.
Teach me some melodious measure
sung by flaming tongues above.
Praise the mount! I'm fixed upon it,

mount of thy redeeming love.

2 Here I raise to thee an altar;
hither by thy help I've come;
and I hope, by thy good pleasure,
safely to arrive at home.
Jesus sought me when a stranger,
wandering from the fold of God;
he, to rescue me from danger,
interposed his precious blood.

3 O to grace how great a debtor
daily I'm constrained to be!
Let thy goodness, like a fetter,
bind my wandering heart to thee.
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,
prone to leave the God I love;
here's my heart, O take and seal it,
seal it from thy courts above.

A Pastoral Prayer

written by Kerry Weber, Executive Editor for the Jesuit Review

Jesus Christ, you traveled through towns and villages “curing every disease and illness.” At your command, the sick were made well. Come to our aid now, in the midst of the global spread of the coronavirus, that we may experience your healing love.

Heal those who are sick with the virus. May they regain their strength and health through quality medical care.

Heal us from our fear, which prevents nations from working together and neighbors from helping one another.

Heal us from our pride, which can make us claim invulnerability to a disease that knows no borders.

Jesus Christ, healer of all, stay by our side in this time of uncertainty and sorrow.

Be with those who have died from the virus. May they be at rest with you in your eternal peace.

Be with the families of those who are sick or have died. As they worry and grieve, defend them from illness and despair. May they know your peace.

Be with the doctors, nurses, researchers and all medical professionals who seek to heal and help those affected and who put themselves at risk in the process. May they know your protection and peace.

Be with the leaders of all nations. Give them the foresight to act with charity and true concern for the well-being of the people they are meant to serve. Give them the wisdom to invest in long-term solutions that will help prepare for or prevent future outbreaks. May they know your peace, as they work together to achieve it on earth.

Whether we are home or abroad, surrounded by many people suffering from this illness or only a few, Jesus Christ, stay with us as we endure and mourn, persist and prepare. In place of our anxiety, give us your peace.

Jesus Christ, heal us.

Taizé Chant:

“Live in charity and steadfast love. Live in charity; God will dwell with you.”

Message and Scripture

Rev. Joanna D’Agostino

**** We’ve included this transcript, word-for-word, for the benefit of people who do not have audio access on their computer. Please keep in mind that it is written in the way it’s spoken, so the grammar/sentence structure may feel a bit awkward to read. Even so, this felt like the best way to communicate.*

Prayer: God may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our gathered hearts in this hour be acceptable in your sight, for you are our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Today’s scripture in our Lectionary is the story of the Samaritan woman at the well-- I’ll read it in a moment. It’s one of my favorites, and I happen to know that at least a couple women at our church consider it a favorite as well. Paula Deal was to be our lector this week and she had written a preface to the scripture that is really relevant to what I want to say today. She wrote, “Both Jesus and the Samaritan woman are breaking so many cultural and religious

taboos, some that could actually have led to their deaths, yet their meeting instead leads to living water and spiritual sustenance. Still today, many people have found the same when encountering Jesus and opening their hearts to his offer of extravagant love, healing grace, and abundant life.”

She’s right... you know, actually with all this talk of social distancing, it is true that what the Samaritan woman was doing was social distancing. Let me read most of it first and then I’ll tell you why.

So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."

Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back." The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!"

So what she’s doing is Social Distancing, actually... For different reasons than us right now, of course. It’s very likely that she, having been married so many times before and being with a man who was not her husband, was considered very unclean. She probably had rules regarding going to the common well at the same time as the other women who were following the community rules. She was an outcast in her society. So she needed to go separately. We hate to hear that, as people who want to bring everyone into the fold all the time, we hate this idea that anyone would not be allowed in community.

But that is exactly the beauty of this Gospel lesson. Jesus shows up. She’s supposed to be distant from society, but Jesus shows up. She comes to the well, isolated and alone... maybe she has a husband but it doesn’t sound like a great relationship... we don’t know all the

details but Jesus knows that she needs something more and so he says to her, “will you give me something to drink?” She’s really shocked because umm... why would he want water from her? And he says, “Actually I want to give you something that will well up in you like a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.” And she says, “yeah that’s what I want. I want something real; something pure; something sustainable-- extravagant love, healing grace, abundant life.”

The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.

That’s right, we’ll worship at a computer in our homes for a while, I guess.

I’m gonna skip a bunch in our scripture, even though the passage goes on a little while longer, because I don’t want to dilute this message here. I wanna stay here for a minute: *"Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."*

I don’t know all the ways God will be revealed to us in this time of social distancing. I don’t know what we have to be afraid of. I don’t know if we are overreacting or underreacting. I keep thinking of Dr. Amy Acton yesterday on the Governor’s press conference and how she said, “On the front end of a pandemic you look a little like an alarmist.... on the back end of a pandemic, you look like you didn’t do enough.” So we don’t know right now and we sure hate not knowing, right? But I do know that God has told us over and over and over and over again-- do not be afraid. Perfect love casts out fear. Can any of you, by worrying, add a single hour to your span of life?

So this is what we will do-- we will listen to science and our leaders; we will socially distance ourselves; we will make our own good decisions for the greater good and not for our own selfish gain; and we will not let fear fuel us or paralyze us. Our fuel will be the Living Water... our fuel will be that even when we are distant, even when we go to the well all on our own, Jesus shows up and he will give us something to drink and he will give us what we need to come back into community. That will be the fuel we need to move forward one step at a time right now.

This is how the scripture ends, you know, I’m gonna skip around a little bit but this is basically how it ends-- she went back to the city and they welcomed her in a way they hadn’t before. She said to the people, "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?" They left the city and were on their way to him. Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony. They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world."

This woman, you know, she didn't have any power or pull or influence on that community. She was isolated in so many ways, cast out, set aside. And yet when it was time to go back to the community, she bravely told them of her experience and somehow they listened to her, they pulled her closer in, they respected her testimony. When we are alone, Jesus shows up and he gives us something to drink and in doing so, he gives us what we need to come closer to community.

Can you imagine what that might look like for you in this time? To socially distance yourself for a bit, for the extent of this, to meet Jesus there, and then to go back into community closer than you ever were before? I'm ready to watch it happen. We're going to be okay. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Benediction

Beloved, go forth from this moment, even if you remain in the same place. I hope this gathering of hearts has been healing for you. Go knowing that we can distance ourselves in any way and yet we do not distance ourselves from God-- Father, Son, Holy Spirit; One God; Mother of us all.

Postlude

Allegro from Mozart's Sonata in G, KV 283

Performed by Ben Malkevitch, Director of Music Ministries