

Lakewood Congregational Church,

A Congregation of the United Church of Christ

Sunday, March 22, 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 but everything is so fluid right now and we’re working to develop our role within the efforts of the wider community. If you do not receive the emails from our church office and would like to, please email Karen at karen@lcc-church.org.
- Please join us on Facebook at Lakewood Congregational Church at 11:00 on Sunday morning for Facebook Live Coffee Hour.

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

Ain't-a That Good News

Arr. Jacqueline Hairston, Performed by Noah Hampton and Ben Malkevitch

Call to Worship

One: God, sometimes, the days are long, the nights are even longer, and we’re so tired. And then You soothe us and bring us to gentle places.

Many: You are our shepherd, and we don’t need a thing.

One: Sometimes, life is moving too fast, and we can’t find a moment to breathe. And then You surround us with stillness and bring an even rhythm to our breath.

Many: You are our shepherd, and we don’t need a thing.

One: Sometimes, we’re parched, and it seems nothing will quench our thirst, We’re famished and we can’t find anything to eat. And then You refresh and fill us.

Many: You are our shepherd, and we don’t need a thing.

One: Sometimes, the valley is dark and the shadows are heavy and we're afraid. But then we feel Your strength, and we have courage.

Many: You are our shepherd, and we don't need a thing.

One: There are the times when it seems we're up against the world,

Many: You show those who push the hardest that You have called us to serve. You touch us, and we are blessed.

One: We will praise You and dwell with you forever, O God.

Many: We will worship You this day and always!

Hymn

Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us

1. Savior, like a shepherd lead us, much we need thy tender care;
in thy pleasant pastures feed us, for our use thy folds prepare.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus, thou hast brought us, thine we are;
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus, thou hast brought us, thine we are.
2. We are thine; do thou befriend us; be the guardian of our way;
keep thy flock; from sin defend us; seek us when we go astray.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus, hear thy children when we pray;
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus, hear thy children when we pray.
3. Early let us seek thy favor; early let us do thy will;
blessed Lord and only Savior, with thy love our spirits fill.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus, thou hast loved us, love us still;
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus, thou hast loved us, love us still.

Prayer

Magnificent God who sees all that we can see and everything that we cannot, we gather in awe of your vision that is broad and vast. Be with us now as we worship you. Awaken us to your holiness, inspire us with your creative power, and peel back our layers of anxiety and fear. Enliven us to trust fully in your love for us as we struggle and strive to be who you call us to be, in Christ's holy name. Amen.

Psalm 23, read by various people in our LCC Family

The Lord's Prayer

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.

Message

**** 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 feels like the best way to communicate to as many people as possible.

Prayer: God may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, for you are our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

I don't know how to preach this week other than to tell you a little bit about what I'm feeling. I started off the week really strong. I thought, "Our community is so strong and together in this unprecedented time we will make it stronger by building connections in new and authentic ways" and actually, I believe that entirely. My opinion there never faltered. If there is any human community that can handle this difficult time with grace and redemption, it is Lakewood Congregational Church...it is Lakewood, Ohio...I believe that. But even holding onto that optimism, as the week went by, I also felt so heavy with disappointments, and by Thursday the disappointments were weighing on me hard and I was sad and I was tired.

The thing is that I recognize that, at its worst, this pandemic is about the life and death of God's people in this world and we hold the health and safety of our neighbors as our highest priority. But we don't have to skim over the fact that Covid-19 is also a pandemic of human disappointment. All those cancellations and postponements, life completely on hold, and that's hard for us too.

Just as an example, I'm sad because my son was heading into his 5th week of gymnastics at Sokol Ceska Sin Gymnastics and he was really thriving, coming out of his shell, discovering a part of himself that was empowering and when I received the cancelation email, though I knew it was coming, my heart sunk like a lead balloon. He asked me a couple days later, while practicing his backbends on my yoga mat, if Covid-19 meant no more gymnastics, and I watched the disappointment wash over his face. I have watched that same face in all three of my kids-- you can't go to that birthday party, the neighbors can't come in our house, we can't go to faith formation, and perhaps most painfully, we don't think you'll go back to school this year. This week wasn't just full of disappointments for the kids, of course. I'm sure we were all disappointed in some form or another over the past few days-- I was so looking forward to our second Strengthfinders and Spiritual Gifts class, to coffee dates I had on the calendar, to *Seussical the Musical*, to haircuts, to plans in my personal life and friendships I was building on and growing.

I'm not saying all of this to bring you down (and can you trust me that I'll end this message with the Good News) I'm saying it because I want to name something I think so many of us are feeling-- that as deeply as we might understand the need for physical distancing, staying home, sheltering-in-place in order to save lives... many of us are still drowning in a sea of disappointment-- grandchildren we can't hug, work projects we put on hold, spring break trips we can't take.

Most importantly I want you to know this: Even if we know of God's deep and abiding presence, it is still okay to feel your feelings. I've been reminding myself of this digital illustration I have-- it says, "It's OK to feel all the feels"-- and I want to show it to you so that you can remember that you are going through a lot right now and you don't need to just brush those emotions away and move on. It's by Carmi Grau. Whether you are concerned for your own physical health, whether you're concerned for your own mental health, whether you're concerned about your sobriety, about your marriage, about your job, about your children, about your parents, about your parenting... it's okay. You're allowed to feel your feelings. And if today you're feeling is disappointment that is okay.

Now, if today your feeling is loneliness, I want to help you with that on two levels. First, I want you to know that I have received countless messages from members of our church saying, “if someone you know is lonely and in need of connection, I would be more than happy to make a phone call or correspond with that person in some way or another.” So if today your feeling is loneliness please let me know and I’ll connect you to someone or reach out to you myself or both. LCC is ready to Be the Church in creative ways. It is very likely that we will feel lonely in this time, but there are steps we can take to connect in that loneliness. Please reach out.

Second, if the feeling you’re feeling is loneliness, I can help you by reminding you to listen to Psalm 23 over and over and over again. Pray it, sing it, hold it up against your heart. God does not abandon us, and if we feel that God has abandoned us, it is because we are looking for love in the wrong places.

So at the beginning of Lent, back when we were in this space together and distancing was not on our minds, we were participating in a worship series called, “Looking for love in all the wrong places.” On week one, we talked about the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness, and discussed the futility of looking for love in the things that only provide temporary satisfaction, in seeking empty highs, and in mindless adoration. So we shifted to “look for the resistor” and focused on Jesus’ resistance to temptation and how when we resist those things that provide only temporary satisfaction, we find deeper communion with God. On week two, we talked about how sometimes we are so eager to prove ourselves that we are not willing to ask for help when we need it, and in our stubbornness we are closing ourselves off from allowing the love of God to work through us. So we looked for the helper. Week three is when the world started to change, and we had our first online service. The Samaritan woman at the well found out that the water she came for was not really the water she needed so desperately. She found soul-quenching love in the living water, and became a powerful messenger of Good News.

This week we are looking for the shepherd. Many of us spend our lives looking for shepherds, looking for leaders, looking for someone to tell us how to make the right choices and do the next right thing. The problem comes in times like now, when we look quickly to our government, to our supervisors, to our pastors, to our media, to walk us beside still waters and restore our souls and what we find is flawed human leadership-- that’s not a statement about any specific political figure or leader, that’s a statement about humans-- and when we turn in that direction for security, we will come back feeling lonely.

Beloved, look for the shepherd. We worship a God who does not abandon us, who did not abandon us, who will not abandon us. We worship a God whose presence is steadfast and persistent and it would behoove all of us to connect with that presence in this time.

Now if the feeling you’re feeling is fear, I want to address that too. Perhaps you’ve heard me before, quoting Elizabeth Gilbert in her Letter to Fear. She writes to fear, “I acknowledge that you believe you have an important job to do in my life and that you take it seriously... keep doing your job if you feel you must. You’re allowed to have a seat and you’re allowed to have a voice but you are not allowed to have a vote, and you are absolutely forbidden to drive.”

We will have fear during this time because we are humans. That feeling of dread will bubble up inside of us like it always does, maybe even more so in this deeply unpredictable and unprecedented time. But that feeling of dread is absolutely forbidden to drive us today. Because it will drive us in the opposite direction of the still waters, of the restoration of

the soul... it will drive us away from the table prepared before us, away from the overflowing cup, fear will drive us away from goodness and mercy, it will drive us away from the House of the Lord. If the feeling you're feeling today is fear-- say hi to her for me, I know her well- - and then send her to the back seat and remind her that she doesn't get to make any decisions for you.

As people who walk in the way of Jesus Christ, we already have a decision-maker. Our decision-maker is Love. The unconditional, unbridled, unmatched love of God which we internalize, magnify, and then turn outward to our neighbor. Love is our decision-maker. Love is our shepherd.

Be kind to yourself and to your soul these days, sweet church. Be kind to the people and animals who live in your home-- they didn't expect to spend this much time with you either and they are living, breathing, balls of emotion too.

And hey, I guess I should say, if the feeling you're feeling right now is connectedness and deep gratitude, then hold that space and magnify it. We need you. I often have that feeling too. I'm deeply grateful for you, dear church. I feel connected to you in our distance. I'm looking forward to being with many of you during coffee hour on Facebook Live at 11 am each Sunday morning for the foreseeable future, and I am looking forward to being with you again in this space when the time is right.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Benediction

Beloved, go forth from this place connected and connecting. Feel your feelings. But look for the shepherd, who will guide you in ways of courage and redeeming love. Amen.

Postlude

Bagatelle no. 1 by Finzi

Performed by Michael Komperda, clarinet and Ben Malkevitch, piano