

# Lakewood Congregational Church,

*A Congregation of the United Church of Christ*

Sunday, April 19, 2020

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



## Welcome and Announcements

- Please join us on Facebook at Lakewood Congregational Church at **11:00am 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
- By using the donate button on the church's website [www.lcc-church.org](http://www.lcc-church.org)
- Call the church office at (216) 221-9555 to discuss other options

Let us worship God.

## Prelude

*Sheep May Safely Graze* by Johann Sebastian Bach

Naomi Columna, soprano; Ben Malkevitch, organ (remote collaboration)

## Welcoming Words

*Leader:* Easter is not just a day. It is a whole season of time when we remember that Jesus' Spirit lives on in each one of us. In the book of Acts, the early church was described in this way:

*“Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people.” (Acts 2: 46-47a)*

So over the next few weeks, we are following our ancestor's traditions. We are creating a “temple” of worship in our hearts whether we can be physically together or not. By sharing in words and music and breathing and moving, and maybe sometimes even eating together, we will stay connected. The earliest Christians worshiped in their homes before they had churches, and so will we, until we can meet again in our sanctuary. Because in our hearts we are connected through the Spirit that makes us one in love.

## Opening Act of Centering Our Hearts as One

We are going to center our hearts as one to begin.  
Let's take a deep breath together *[everyone breathes together]*.

I invite you to place your hand on your heart and listen to this beat and know that our hearts beat together, and let us pray.

*[Drum beat]*

Holy Living God,  
Heartbeat of Creation,  
help us to take this time to center on you,  
for you made us,  
you gave us life,  
and you continue to be with us  
every moment...

*[wait a couple of beats]*  
every breath...

*[wait a couple of beats]*  
every step.

*[the heartbeat tapping fades away]*

Hear this assurance from God:

*[sing to the tune of Amazing Grace-if you aren't comfortable singing it, you can say it]*

**Be still, O heart, you're not alone,  
your beat is shared with me.  
Come now, and calm, and center here,  
you're mine, secure and free.**

Let's take another deep breath, making sure our shoulders and any tension we feel in our bodies is letting go with the breath. *[Pause to do so]*

Let's take another one. *[Pause to do so]*

We offer a prayer of letting go:

*Everything we hold on to,  
that holds us,  
shapes us,  
controls us,  
and makes us doubt your presence (pause)  
help us to let go now.  
**We receive your Holy Spirit.***

*The memories of hurt,  
that speak loudly to us,  
that cripple us,  
dull us,  
and make us doubt your presence (pause)  
help us to let go now.*

***We receive your Holy Spirit.***

*The words that linger,  
that have found a home in our reasoning,  
that haunt us,  
echo in us,  
and make us doubt your presence (pause)  
help us to let go now.*

***We receive your Holy Spirit.***

*The acts we have done,  
that have hurt and abused others,  
that linger in us and bound others,  
and make us doubt your presence (pause)  
help us to let go now.*

***We receive your Holy Spirit.***

Now please join me in singing our opening hymn, *I've Got Peace Like a River.*

# I've Got Peace Like a River

530

1. I've got peace like a riv - er, I've got peace like a  
2. I've got joy like a foun-tain, I've got joy like a  
3. I've got love like an o - cean, I've got love like an

1  
riv - er, I've got peace like a riv - er in my  
foun-tain, I've got joy like a foun-tain in my  
o - cean, I've got love like an o - cean in my

2  
soul. I've got riv - er in my soul.  
soul. I've got foun-tain in my soul.  
soul. I've got o - cean in my soul.

WORDS: African-American spiritual  
MUSIC: African-American spiritual

PEACE LIKE A RIVER  
77.10

## Prayer

Let's hold a moment of space here together to name the prayers that are on our hearts:

God, hold these petitions and hold us, bring us closer to one another and allow us to feel the ways our hearts are connected, and then let us join in the prayer our Savior taught us:

## 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.

## Scripture Reading, read by Nora Katzenberger

### John 20:19-31

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

## 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.*

It's the second Sunday of Easter and we're still in quarantine, and in front of us we have this question: how do we live into the resurrection at a time when grief appears to be in charge? And so on this second Sunday of Easter, we might say, "now what?" Thankfully, this question predates Covid-19 by centuries. In fact, the second Sunday of Easter has always been a point in the liturgical year when we look around us and think, "Now what?" or maybe even, "so what?"

Each year on the second Sunday of Easter we read the passage famously known as the "Doubting Thomas" passage. I hate that term for it, though. I call him "Discerning Thomas." Because "doubting" is loaded with shame, and I like Thomas and I hate shame, and I wanna know, who doesn't ever question their faith? Who doesn't wonder, "now what?" or "so what?" Discerning Thomas lives in the questions and seeks to understand more clearly what it's all about. I'm a Discerning Thomas, and I think many of you are too, and I know that God is glorified by our discernment.

The other thing is that the opposite of faith is not doubt. I believe that faith and doubt can live together quite beautifully. The opposite of faith is fear. And so when I read this passage, I always wanna know why we're so hung up on Thomas questioning Jesus' rather than being hung up on the rest of the Disciples who are hiding in the locked room because they are afraid. Because if you read between the lines, Thomas isn't hiding in the room. He's out there. He's loose and at large in the world. He's discerning how to live out the Gospel in the world now.

And so this week we find the Disciples in hiding—completely overwhelmed by the events that had just come to pass. Their leader, who had called each of them to give up their lives and follow him, who astonished them day after day, and who turned everything they ever knew upside-down had just been executed like a common criminal and they had betrayed him and left him when he really needed them and then this woman, Mary Magdalene, comes to tell them that he's still alive! The emotions are flying! The text says that they're hiding in fear, but it's definitely more complicated than that. Their leader was gone and they had no idea what to do or where to go next. They were told to continue proclaiming the Gospel—the Good News and they probably weren't even sure anymore if they knew exactly what that meant. And they knew that if their leader had just been killed, they ran a pretty good risk of being killed for proclaiming the same things. It was easier to hide than to deal with the world outside. If the government and their own individual families weren't enough to overwhelm them, the fact that Jesus is alive left a huge lump of guilt in their throats. They didn't leave Jesus on the best terms, remember? They had abandoned him in his hour of need, and now they're being told that he's still alive. What will he think of them? How will he treat them? Will he ever forgive them? The Disciples couldn't imagine facing life outside of that locked room, so they stayed there.

And Jesus appeared among them, and he looked at his Disciples, and what did he say? He said, “Peace be with you.”

Everything he just went through, everything they just went through, everything they’re going through now, all the questions about the future, all the regrets, all the fear, and he stands there all the sudden-- the Risen Christ among them-- and he says, “Peace be with you.”



Many of you know my tattoo story, but I’m going to tell it again now. I have a big ole tattoo on my left bicep. It’s not everyone’s thing and not everyone likes it, but I always joke, I didn’t get it for you, I got it for me, for my own constant reminder that God did not ask me-- or any of us-- to carry the weight of the world.

Several years ago, I read a book that really changed my perspective on my role within the world. This tiny book, called *Weight* by Jeanette Winterson (warning: for language and content reasons, it’s not a church book club book), is a retelling of the story of Atlas and Heracles, in which Atlas is trying to trick Heracles into taking the world upon his shoulders instead. After aeons of bribery and trickery, the book ends on this incredibly powerful point. Atlas, holding the weight of the world upon his shoulders, looks at the universe and says, “Why not just put it down?” And then he does. He sets the world down and... nothing happens. It enters into orbit and Atlas walks away. For aeons and aeons he had held the world on his shoulders, heavy and cramping, oppressing and imprisoning him. And after all that time, he realized he didn’t have to carry it.

In reading the book, it occurred to me that I had built my life from the time I was a small child carrying the world’s grief upon my own shoulders and I started to ask myself that question, “Why not just put it down?”

The question rolled around in my head. But the answer was not so simple. The reason I couldn’t “just put it down” was because I knew that God called me to hold and care for the hurts and pains and brokenness of those whom God put into my life. As servants of God, our call is to be in tune with the world’s needs.

Then, while remaining in tune with the needs of the community around me in Seminary, we had a baby girl. She was nurtured and grew in the waters of my womb and through the nutrients of my milk. I carried her, in every literal and metaphorical sense of the word. We moved to Wisconsin and I started pastoral ministry. I held, carried, and loved each and every member of that congregation and community. Soon after I started, we had a baby boy, and I carried him too. I continued to carry



that congregation and community and, when we least expected it, we had another baby girl, and I carried her. I found myself carrying increasingly more and more, to the detriment of my own physical health and spiritual growth. I became increasingly exhausted and burnt out.

This question nagged at me, “Why not just put it down?” Was I really making any difference in the world by carrying it all? On the worst days, I would wonder about running away-- from ministry, from motherhood, from anything in which people depended on me. On the best days, I knew that my dedication to uplifting God’s people had an undeniably positive ripple effect on the world.

As I struggled with the question, I stumbled upon a verse from The Talmud, a text that is central to Rabbinic Judaism: “Do not be daunted by the enormity of the world’s grief. Do justly, now; love mercy, now; walk humbly, now. You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to abandon it.”

The answer for me, as a highly-sensitive person, and perhaps for all of us, is in this teaching. We are not obligated to do it alone, to complete it, to take the whole enormous thing upon our own shoulders and walk through our lives exhausted under its grief. But we are also not free from our call as God’s beloved and our identity as interconnected siblings in the human family.

This is my tattoo story. The hand belongs to Atlas... to God... to me... depending on the way I’m feeling. And the hand is spinning the world into orbit. Putting it down, letting it go, but certainly not abandoning it.

Applying it to today is new. You see, we find ourselves in a locked room, but it’s not because of fear, it’s because of community obligation. We are in a place where we can’t distract ourselves by carrying it all. We can’t zip from place to place trying to accomplish the full and complete healing of the world through our own actions and our efforts. We can’t pick up every homeless person, every homebound person, collect all the imprisoned and put them on our shoulders, we can’t feed every person, we can’t give everyone something to drink, we can’t keep every recovering alcoholic from picking up that bottle, we can’t hold our grieving community, we can’t carry it all because we are the ones in the locked room. Not because we’re afraid of going out there but because we know that the bravest most faithful thing we can do is stay in here.

We carry a different weight in here. It’s the weight of grief, of confusion, of helplessness, of loneliness, of adaptation, of financial insecurity, and still fear.

When Jesus appears in the locked room, stands among them, and says “peace be with you,” I think that what he is saying is, “why not just put it down?” The minds of the Disciples are running a mile a minute and Jesus appears and completely calmly, showing no anger at all, stands among them and says, “Peace be with you.” Stop being overwhelmed. Stop trying to pick it all up at once. Calm down.

Receive my peace. You're okay. Put it down. When Jesus showed up in that room and said to them, "Peace be with you," Jesus was telling them that they could put down whatever was paralyzing them because they didn't have to do any of this on their own. Do not be daunted by the enormity of the world's grief. You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to abandon it.

This morning, Rachel sent me a succinct and poignant quote from the author Najwa Zebian that aligns with all of this: these mountains you are carrying, you were only supposed to climb.

Just like the Disciples, our mission as Christians is to live the Gospel of Jesus Christ, to walk in that way, to climb the mountains, but not to carry them. The Gospel—the Good News itself is not overwhelming or heavy. In fact it has no weight at all. It lifts every weight. It liberates; it nourishes; it quenches; it clothes; it heals; it fixes. The Gospel is not heavy. It is challenging, it requires perseverance, it takes one step at a time, but it is not heavy.

What is heavy and overwhelming is the weight that we allow to pile up on top of it in the form of worry and anxiety and nervousness and self-consciousness and shame. That weight paralyzes us, it shames us, it daunts us, and it prevents us from doing the next right thing. And that's the weight that Jesus took away when he spoke those words to his Disciples: peace be with you. Put it down.

That Peace of Christ enables us to take the next step. It lightens us enough to do the next right thing, to take the next step, to persevere on the road ahead of us. Love God and love your neighbor. Feel your connectedness. Rest in that peace and listen to God's call upon your life. God's call will not be a heavy call, for this yoke is easy, and this burden is light. If it is heavy, put it down. The world is God's and we are on it, not the other way around.  
Thanks be to God. Amen.

## **Benediction**

As this morning starts a new week, may we embrace the peace of God-  
A peace which will carry us through moments of turmoil,  
A peace which will connect us with God and neighbor,  
A peace which will ask us to be still, and get to know God,  
A peace which surpasses our understanding.  
May the hope of God, the peace of Christ, and the love of the Spirit  
chase away despair and encourage us to embrace divine serenity.  
Father, Son, Holy Spirit-- One God, Mother of us All.  
Amen!

## **Postlude**

*Amazing Grace*, arr. Doug Walter  
Tim Hampton, marimba