

Lakewood Congregational Church,

A Congregation of the United Church of Christ

Sunday, April 26, 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.



Photo by Christy Gray, taken over Lake Erie from her paddle boat

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.”

- 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
- By using the donate button on the church's website www.lcc-church.org
- Call the church office at (216) 221-9555 to discuss other options

Let us worship God.

Prelude

Sing for Joy by Purcell, arr. Hopson

LCC Virtual Choir - Naomi Columna, Gwen Delaney, Peter Hampton, Tim Hampton, Noah Hamrick, Michael Komperda, Ben Liu, Ben Malkevitch, Robert Wenz

Stewardship Update

We give thanks for God's calling and for the treasures, time, and talents provided by God. With gratitude, we pray together:

Divine Presence, in these times of wilderness, you shine your light upon us. You help us to realize our purpose and give us wisdom on the best ways to utilize our gifts. Open our souls to possibilities on how we can minister and share your love with our church and community - even when we are miles apart. Amen.

Hymn

Thine Is the Glory

Thine is the glo - ry, ri - sen, con-querer Son; end - less is the
Lo! Je - sus meets us, ri - sen, from the tomb; lo - ving - ly He
No more we doubt thee, glo - rious Prince of life! Life is_ nought with -

5

vic - t'ry thou o'er death hast won. An - gels in bright rai - ment
greet us, scat - ters fear and gloom. Let His church with glad - ness
out Thee; aid us in our strife. Make us_ more than con - querors,

10

rolled the stone a - way, kept the fol - ded grave clothes where thy bo - dy
hymns of tri-umph sing, for_ her Lord now liv - eth: death hath lost its
through thy death-less love: bring us_ safe through Jor - dan to thy home a -

15

lay. Thine is the glo - ry, ri - sen_ con-querer Son;
sing.
bove.

20

end - less_ is the vic - t'ry thou o'er death hast won.

Prayer

For those who are sick. **Lord, hear our prayer.**

For those who are bereaved and supporting the bereaved. **Lord, hear our prayer.**

For those of us who are anxious and afraid. **Lord, hear our prayer.**

For those of us feeling alone and isolated. **Lord, hear our prayer.**

For those who have jobs that put them at risk and can't afford to miss a day's work. **Lord, hear our prayer.**

For those of us who are especially vulnerable to infection. **Lord, hear our prayer.**

For those who are confined to home but not safe at home. **Lord, hear our prayer.**

For the children who need the safety and care of school and those who serve them. **Lord, hear our prayer.**

For the teachers, who are forging a brand new way. **Lord, hear our prayer.**

For the medical professionals and health care workers around the world. **Lord, hear our prayer.**

For the scientists and researchers who are dedicating their lives to helping us - many of whom are under pressure and underfunded. **Lord, hear our prayer.**

For our leaders. Who really need the strength and humility of discernment. **Lord, hear our prayer.**

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 Christy Gray

Luke 24:13-35

Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, 'What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?' They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, 'Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?' He asked them, 'What things?' They replied, 'The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.'

Then he said to them, ‘Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?’ Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, ‘Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.’ So, he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, ‘Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?’ That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, ‘The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!’ Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

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.

Every Saturday morning lately, when it comes time for me to film these services I wake up with a prayer and it goes something like, “O God, equip me with the energy and the wisdom to say something that can contribute to the healing of this moment...”

I feel a bit... umm... unequipped to speak a life-giving word in this strange, liminal time.

First I’ll say, I’m a child of the Sims video games-- I’ll be 33 next week-- so when I was in middle school and high school, I spent much time playing the Sims with my brother and my friends. You may know what I’m talking about, but in case you don’t-- it was a game where you simulated peoples lives: built them a home, got them a job, fed them, introduced them to one another, and so on. Each character who you controlled had an energy meter above their head, which was broken down into a bunch of smaller energy meters at the bottom of the screen. I can’t remember them all, but hunger, sleep, hygiene, socialization... things like that, and the player’s job was to maintain the levels. So I still sometimes picture the little energy meter hanging out above my head or the heads of my partner and kids. You know when you’re all rested and fed and clean and properly socialized, the energy meter is green, but if you’re hungry and tired and you need a bath and you miss people, the energy meter is red, and we do what we can to repair it. So right now I feel like no matter how much I’ve eaten or slept or talked to people on the phone, my energy level is still like... yellow-orange at best. Okay so yellow-orange energy is just my Covid Quarantine reality. And if your Covid Quarantine reality is green, then you get to do next week’s sermon.

So this week somebody called me at a time when my energy meter was red, which is pretty often. Real, real red, and so instead of answering the phone I texted them back. I said, “hey I’m gonna have to talk to you later because I feel like my hand and my phone are becoming one appendage.” And then I switched over to Google on my phone and I Googled this: “Is a hand an appendage?” Confirmed that it is, and then went back to the text and pressed send.

This is a story about brain and energy capacity.

And y'all are like, "hey you're the person we trust each week on a publicly shared video to tell us about God's ability to enter in and redeem this strange unprecedented, grief-filled, lonely, overwhelming, exhausting time. We're gonna ask the person who just googled "is a hand an appendage" to tell us the Good News about how to walk in the way of Jesus Christ.

Thank God, God does not call the equipped, God equips the called. I hope.

I should add a disclaimer, too, that I do love when you call, email, and text me. Please do not stop doing that because I love hearing from you. I just appreciate your grace when I respond with an honest answer about following up at another time.

I tell you these things about how I'm feeling because I think that when we are wholehearted with each other, we're able to see that we are not alone. I see you out there caring for your kids and your grandkids and your aging parents, I see you who are living alone and haven't felt physical contact with another human in weeks. I see you news-junkies who are entirely overwhelmed by the tsunami of news. I see you front-line workers keeping our world turning.

And I want you to know that if your energy level hasn't been above orange-yellow in weeks, then I see you, and you are enough.

The serenity prayer has been a guiding mantra for me through this time. I've talked about a few guiding mantras over the past several weeks. I think it's because right now in my home, I'm pulled in many different directions at a time, and it's helpful to have something short and memorable that I can recite to myself as I'm trying to keep my heart at peace. So a few weeks ago I told you about "tune my heart to sing God's grace." I've told you about "why not just put it down?"

But the serenity prayer, too:

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
the courage to change the things I can,
and the wisdom to know the difference... and we could continue the lesser-known part of the prayer:
Living one day at a time,
Enjoying one moment at a time,
Accepting hardship as a pathway to peace,
Taking, as Jesus did,
This sinful world as it is,
Not as I would have it,
Trusting that You will make all things right,
If I surrender to Your will,
So that I may be reasonably happy in this life,
And supremely happy with You forever in the next.

The "accepting hardship as a pathway to peace" part is pretty real right now, and here in a little bit we're gonna talk about pathways because our scripture is the Road to Emmaus, as Jesus' disciples began to spread out into the world.

I'll talk about Brene Brown more than once this morning because she has been speaking really beautifully about our emotional processing of the pandemic in her podcast called "Unlocking Us" which I highly commend to all of you. One of the things she talks about is how dangerous it is right now in the midst of a crisis for us to rank our pain. She calls it "comparative suffering." It's when we say something like, "Who am I to complain about missing my college graduation, because there are people who are sick? I can't be scared for my children because there are children sleeping on the street tonight." ... "comparing our suffering is not how emotion works. Emotions do not go away because we send them a message that says that they aren't ranked high enough in terms of the world's grief-o-meter. We can't just stop being sad about something we're missing, or scared about how this is all going to pan out, or anxious about the timeline. We can't just stop by telling ourselves that it could be worse. We are in hardship right

now, no matter who we are... every single one of us... and it is my prayer that we can work towards accepting it as a pathway to peace... to recognize the ways in which God is entering in.

So, I've been saying this for a while, not as beautifully as Brene Brown can say it, but please hear me: Your feelings are real. Feel them out. Give them space. Bring them to prayer and sit with them, and sit with God, and sift them out together, and then do the next right thing. And please understand that the next right thing might be taking a nap or rewatching the fourth season of *The Office* for the third time. The next right thing might be going for a walk or making a phone call or doing a house project. The next right thing might be eating a good meal. When we are real with ourselves and we bring that full, wholehearted real self to God, then God will reveal to us what the next right thing to do is, and the next right thing will not be full of shame about not doing enough. It will be full of compassion and grace for ourselves and for one another.

Okay: next right thing. Talk about the Road to Emmaus.

So these Disciples are walking along and they're grieving because Jesus just died, and Jesus himself came near but they didn't know it was Jesus and he said, "what are you talking about?" and his Disciple Cleopas says, "are you the only person who doesn't know about what is happening here?" It's the only thing anyone is talking about. This story of Jesus' crucifixion and alleged resurrection are the only thing anyone has talked about for the last few days. It would be like if we were taking a walk and talking about the virus and someone approached us and implied that they had never heard this news before. They are just like, "what do you mean you haven't heard of this?" And they've kind of heard the promise of the resurrection but they haven't seen it, and they're not sure what to do next or how to feel and Cleopas says this really heart-wrenching line: "And we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel." We had hoped.

I think this road is very familiar to many of us. The, "we had hoped" road. We had hoped for healing, we had hoped for another outcome, we had hoped to keep our jobs, we had hoped to carry that baby to term, we had hoped to recover from the stroke, we had hoped to return to church by Easter, we had hoped to go back to school this year.

The Road to Emmaus is the road upon which we speak our pain, disappointment, bewilderment, and yearning. And I... um... I think we're there. I think we're on that road.

So when we read this passage, what we read about God is that something Holy and Powerful and Sacred is there walking beside us on this road and we just don't see it yet. Something is being revealed and we haven't opened our eyes for it just yet. And so we tell that presence of which we're not fully aware-- we tell it our feelings. "We had hoped for a different outcome."

And this is what I mean when I talk about bringing our feelings to God, sitting with them, sifting them out, and then doing the next right thing.

Because what happens next on the Road to Emmaus is that they gather to share a meal with this stranger, and that stranger does something very normal-- he shares bread with them, and when he takes it and blesses it and breaks it, then they finally know. Something sacred has been happening this whole time.

I have to hope that this will happen to us over and over again throughout this crisis: something will happen that will click and we'll realize that God has been abiding the whole time. It does happen in small ways-- in the right phone call at the right time, in the art and the music and the creative connections that are happening in so many places. I've seen it in facetime calls that happen all day long in my home. I see it in our prayer shawl ministry and driving by peoples houses for birthdays and welcome home celebrations; I've seen it watching the creative ministry of other faith communities and our own. I see it in the very fact that we are willing to go to such extremes in our society to protect the lives of the vulnerable. Something sacred has been abiding this whole time. Something is entering in to redeem that phrase, "We had hoped."

After Jesus breaks the bread and is revealed to them, he vanishes-- it's very fleeting-- and then they say, "weren't our hearts burning the whole time?"

And I want to ask you that-- is your heart burning through this? Is something happening in you that you can feel God's transformation within our world? Because I can't help but wonder if this crisis is waking us up to a new and better way. I can't help but wonder if the reason my energy level is yellow-orange is in part because God is hard at work within our excess energy incubating something that will be revealed to us when we break bread together again.

Brene Brown said: "We will not go back to normal. Normal never was. Our pre-corona existence was not normal other than we normalized greed, inequity, exhaustion, depletion, extraction, disconnection, confusion, rage, hoarding, hate, and lack. We should not long to return, my friends. We are being given the opportunity to stitch a new garment. One that fits all of humanity and nature."

Beloved, I know your energy is low. I know you are on the Emmaus Road of bewilderment and disappointment. On this road, it is time for us to open our hearts wide with wholeheartedness and compassion. It is time for us to be as tender and as we can be with ourselves and with one another, because that is what is going to bring us through this crisis and every crisis that comes.

As we walk this road, notice the burning in your heart. Hold it with God and incubate it together. Something is being revealed.

It will not be revealed in our division and anger and shame and blame; It will be revealed in true empathy and compassion and patience and Grace. I thank God this day and every day for inviting us to the next right thing. Amen.

Benediction

In the steps we take today, tomorrow, or sometime this week, God of Hope,

May we see your presence directly in front of us.

May we feel your presence in the winds above us.

May we smell your presence in the flowers around us.

May we taste your presence in the food surrounding us.

May we hear your presence in the laughter which comes from within us.

For you are always a part of our exiles, our promise lands, our dreams, and our eternities. Amen.

Postlude

How Beautiful by Twila Paris, arr. Larson

Meghan Galloway, soprano; Ben Malkevitch, piano