

# Lakewood Congregational Church,

*A Congregation of the United Church of Christ*

Sunday, May 17, 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

Welcome to worship on the 6th Sunday of Easter. We are glad you're worshipping with us today. Please know that no matter who you are and where you are in life's journey you are welcome and embraced among us to worship a loving God who welcomes us all.

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 the Body of Christ throughout the world, and feel the ways in which our hearts connected to yours.

Say, "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

Please consider fulfilling 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

*Rainbow* by Kasey Musgraves

Edie Barcelona, voice and piano

## Call To Worship

Leader: We long for community and the Presence of God.

People: **In whom we live and move and have our being.**

This day Christ tells us that we will never be alone.  
An Advocate—spirit of Truth--will share our journey.

**With whom we will live and create community and celebrate being.**

May the love of God be with you.

**And the joy of Christ surround you.**

May we know the presence of the Advocate  
as we gather in this community of peace,  
May your Truth lead us to the path of discipleship  
with deeds of bold mercy and courageous justice.

**As an Easter People following a Risen Lord,  
may the life of Jesus live on in us and through us. Amen.**

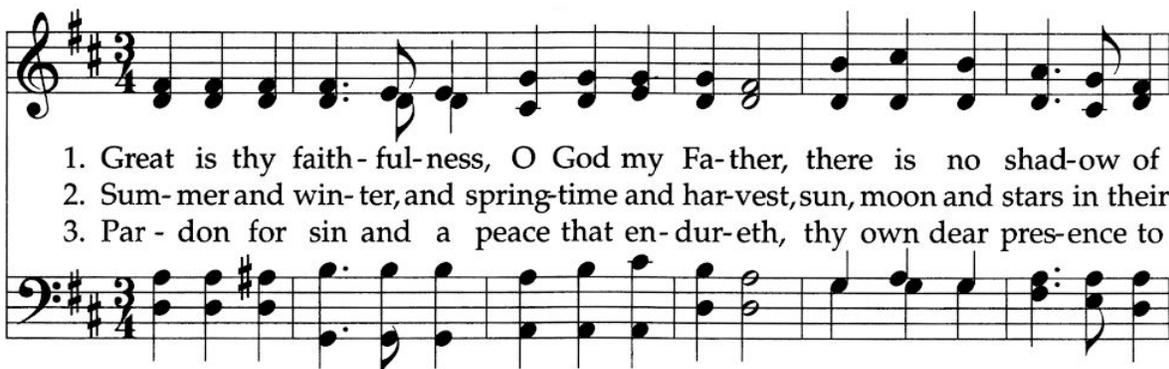
## Invocation

Ever-Present One, we have come here today for many reasons, each with our own story. May these reasons and stories be immersed in your Sacred Story, finding ourselves caught up in the drama and beauty of Jesus' teachings, life, and ministry. Enable us to move boldly into the future and to fulfill the hope of love that Jesus taught, Amen.

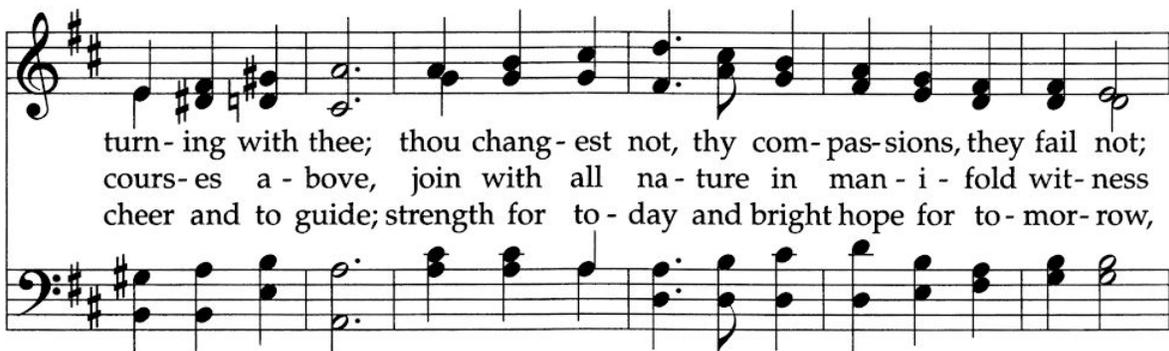
# Hymn

# Great Is Thy Faithfulness

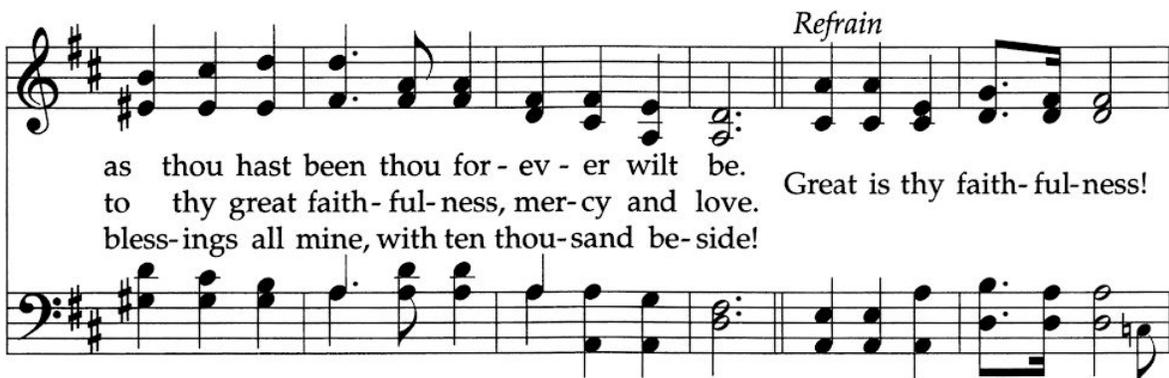
Sung by LCC's Virtual Choir: Naomi Columna, Gwen Delaney, Kay Galloway, Meghan Galloway, Tim Hampton, Ben Liu, Noah Hamrick, Michael Komperda, Robert Wenz; Ben Malkevitch, organ



1. Great is thy faith-ful-ness, O God my Fa-ther, there is no shad-ow of  
2. Sum-mer and win-ter, and spring-time and har-vest, sun, moon and stars in their  
3. Par-don for sin and a peace that en-dur-eth, thy own dear pres-ence to



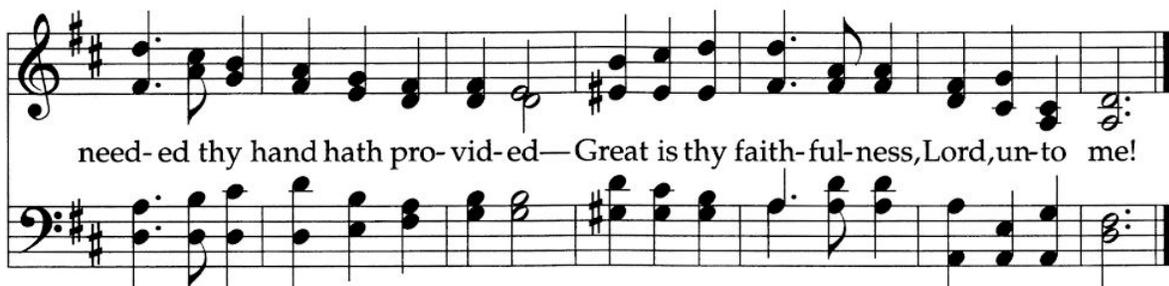
turn-ing with thee; thou chang-est not, thy com-pas-sions, they fail not;  
cours-es a-bove, join with all na-ture in man-i-fold wit-ness  
cheer and to guide; strength for to-day and bright hope for to-mor-row,



*Refrain*  
as thou hast been thou for-ev-er wilt be. Great is thy faith-ful-ness!  
to thy great faith-ful-ness, mer-cy and love.  
bless-ings all mine, with ten thou-sand be-side!



Great is thy faith-ful-ness! Morn-ing by morn-ing new mer-cies I see; all I have



need-ed thy hand hath pro-vid-ed— Great is thy faith-ful-ness, Lord, un-to me!

## **Recognition of Alison Yonkers**

## **Reflections on Chaplaincy at MetroHealth and Pastoral Prayer, led by Sandie King**

### **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.

### **Call to Offering**

Today we call upon you as Children of God to share in the love and work of Jesus. We, as the gathered Church, the Body of Christ, continue in our day to witness and work on behalf of our Lord, returning our gifts, tithes and offerings.

### **Prayer of Dedication**

May these gifts, O God, become action and intention, fulfilling Christ's commandment to love. Amen.

### **Doxology**

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;  
Praise God, all creatures here below;  
Praise God above, ye heavenly hosts;  
Creator, Christ, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

## **Scripture Reading, by the Redman Family (Erica, Doug, LiliAnna, and Quinton)**

### **John 14:15-21**

"If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

"I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them."

## 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.

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. Today's scripture is a part of what we call the "Farewell Discourse" in the Gospel of John. Even though Lent ended several weeks ago, and we went through the farewell during Holy Week, the Lectionary puts parts of John's Farewell Discourse here this week and next, as we near the end of the Easter season. This coming Thursday the Church celebrates the Ascension-- the bodily rising of Jesus into Heaven after he has revealed himself to his Disciples a number of times following his resurrection. Then in two weeks we'll have Pentecost, the birth of the church, the lighting of flames over the heads of Christ's followers so that they have within them a new burning, a new spark to do the work of Jesus in the world.
- II. John's farewell discourse to his Disciples, who are very anxious about his death, is very simple, but urgent pastoral care: you are not alone. Jesus is assuring his companions that his imminent departure from the earth is not an abandonment, but rather a move that will pave the way for a deeper peace and a deeper connection than they have ever known before. Jesus is trying to explain to them: Yes, I'm leaving. But you will still know my presence in a deep and abiding way. You have to trust me. You have to trust the one who sent me. And you have to believe that I have given you everything it takes to be on this journey. You are not alone. Foundational pastoral care.
- III. This passage is reassuring and beautiful in so many ways, but I love, particularly, the use of the word Advocate.
  - A. It is the word Paracletes-- helper, advocate, literally "one who is called alongside." Throughout the Gospel of John, we do read about the Holy Spirit many times-- the Spirit descended like a Dove, born again with water and the Spirit, but those times the word is Ruach in Hebrew or Pneuma in Greek-- breath, wind, air, breathing. Here Spirit is called Advocate. One who is called alongside. You will not be alone, for you will have an Advocate.
- IV. From the time I was very young, I took such great solace in this promise that God was always with me, that Jesus was in my heart, that the Holy Spirit surrounded me and protected me. That when it was dark, I had an everlasting nightlight in my heart because of that Advocate. It is that same language that gets me through these times too. "In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you." I am an everlasting nightlight in your heart.
- V. You've probably heard me talk about the overlap of the Venn Diagram. It's one of my favorite things to talk about. So here it is again: If we were to draw a venn diagram between heaven and earth, with earth being full of human brokenness, strained relationships, greed and resentment, violence and oppression, and heaven being this world where God's creation is whole, and healed, and free, with every baby on every hip fat and healthy-- then our job as followers of Jesus Christ is to occupy the overlap, to live in the space where Heaven and Earth meet, and to declare to people that this world is possible-- that a world of Beloved Community with a baseline of Grace and abiding presence is possible.

- A. The Ascension story points to the overlap. Jesus says, "I'm gonna give you an Advocate." I think it's like a nightlight, a soft sweet bird, a gentle and constant embrace, a little ball of fire and healing ointment. I don't know what that Advocate looks like for you, but Jesus says, "I'm gonna give you this to be with you forever." He says, "the world cannot have it, because it neither sees it nor knows it." He's talking about the part of the Venn Diagram that doesn't overlap-- that part of the diagram doesn't get it. It's too far blinded by greed and selfishness and oppression. And then Jesus says, "I'm going to go to a place where the world can't see me anymore." He's talking about the other side of the Venn Diagram that doesn't overlap. He's going to go to the Heaven part. And then he says, "but because you live here, in the overlap, you will have it, and you will hold it, and you will see it, and you will never be alone." Those who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me, and they are those who live here in this overlap.
  - B. Now I need you to understand that this isn't a situation where some people always live in the world and some people always live in the overlap... our lives are fluid and we are always roaming between them, but God is always calling us here, to the overlap, to the place where the Advocate abides... and our job as Disciples of Christ is to increase and build our lives within the overlap to whatever extent possible.
  - C. And so I wanna know, while we're staying safe at home-- stay safe, stay home, stay connected-- how are we occupying and increasing the overlap? What are you doing to keep yourself connected? Jesus says, "I will not leave you orphaned." but sometimes we pull ourselves away from that promise.
- VI. I wanna tell you a story. This is a story about the Ascension that originated with the Desert Fathers but has been adapted and molded over the centuries and this is the way I know it today.
- A. After Jesus died, he began appearing to his friends. This, of course, usually happened when a group of them got together to talk about him - retelling his jokes and remembering what Jesus taught them. On this particular day, a really large crowd of his friends had gathered, and what do you know, Jesus showed up, too. He began to teach them, saying, "Resist! Pray for enemies! Turn the other cheek! Go the extra mile! And of course, love one another. Every single other."
  - B. When he had said all this, a voice from the heavens boomed, "ASCEND!" And so, he did. Ascend means to rise up. He spread out his arms, looked up to heaven with a smile, and slowly began to rise.
  - C. The disciples watched, stunned, and suddenly, Mary, realizing what was happening, gave a shout, backed up to get a running start, and LEAPT up to grab Jesus's ankle. "I'm coming too!" she cried. John, seeing what was happening, jumped up and grabbed Jesus' OTHER ankle. Jesus, slightly concerned, stopped and looked down at them and then back up to heaven and asked: "God, what do I do?" And God said, "ASCEND!" And so, all together, holding on to one another, lifting each other up, they all began to rise.
  - D. Now the other disciples, seeing Mary and John rising with Jesus, they wanted to go, too, so suddenly all of Jesus' friends are jumping and grabbing onto their ankles, and Mary and John and Jesus reached out to pull them up until there was a small pyramid of people swinging from each other in the sky. A little alarmed, Jesus asked again, "What do I do, God?" Again the voice from heaven BOOMED, "ASCEND!" And all together, holding on to one another, lifting each other up, they all began to rise.
  - E. Then people from all over, folks who had seen Jesus' miracles or heard him preach, people who had seen the friends of Jesus feed the hungry and show kindness, they began to jump up and grab onto the lower most disciples, and slowly, all together, holding on to one another, lifting each other up, they all began to rise.
  - F. But a little girl way at the bottom shouted, "Stop, wait! I want to bring my dog!" And Jesus, WAY up at the top yells back down, "Try to hurry - I don't know how this works!"
  - G. So the little girl, still scanning the horizon, reached out and grabbed a tree and the branch held on tight. Everyone kept rising and the tree began to rise too, and it looked

like the tree would be uprooted, but the tree curled its toes and held on tight to the earth. And the earth started to rise, too, but it reached out to the sea, and the sea grabbed hold with its waves and HELD ON tight and no one let go and slowly, all together, holding on to one another, lifting each other up, the whole world was drawn closer to God.

- VII. The world was drawn closer to God. When we're committed to holding on, that overlap expands and expands and expands and Heaven and Earth are the same. God's creation is whole, and healed, and free, and every baby on every hip is fat and healthy, Beloved Community with a baseline of Grace and abiding presence is happening here as the world is drawn closer to God.
- VIII. Friends I don't know what is happening to our world right now, I don't know what tomorrow will bring, I don't know when we'll embrace each other again, I don't know when senseless violence will end and when every person will be fully aware of their endless love and belonging. I don't know when and I don't know how, but I know that the Advocate-- that the Paraclete-- that the Holy Spirit is giving us an opportunity to draw closer, to widen the overlap, to draw a new picture, to weave a new garment, to create a better world, to bless this moment beyond our understanding. I know that. Open your hearts to it. Reach out your arms and grab onto that Advocate and pull her into your heart.
- IX. So I wanna end with a poem from Jan Richardson, whose poetry I've read to you often. This is a Blessing for Ascension Day and it was written in 2013, but it has aged so perfectly for today, and it's called "Stay":

Stay

A Blessing for Ascension Day

By Jan Richardson

I know how your mind  
rushes ahead  
trying to fathom  
what could follow this.  
What will you do,  
where will you go,  
how will you live?

You will want  
to outrun the grief.  
You will want  
to keep turning toward  
the horizon,  
watching for what was lost  
to come back,  
to return to you  
and never leave again.

For now  
hear me when I say  
all you need to do  
is to still yourself  
is to turn toward one another  
is to stay.

Wait and see what comes  
to fill  
the gaping hole

in your chest.  
Wait with your hands open  
to receive what could never come  
except to what is empty  
and hollow.

You cannot know it now,  
cannot even imagine  
what lies ahead,  
but I tell you  
the day is coming  
when breath will  
fill your lungs  
as it never has before  
and with your own ears  
you will hear words  
coming to you new  
and startling.  
You will dream dreams  
and you will see the world  
ablaze with blessing.

Wait for it.  
Still yourself.  
Stay.

Amen.

## **Benediction**

Now leave this time of worship,  
refreshed and hopeful;  
let love be true and freely given.  
And may you be encouraged and blessed  
by the Advocate  
whose love warms and surrounds you  
like the sun,  
believing that God is with us always,  
as close as our beating hearts. **Amen.**

## **Postlude**

Toccata by Paradies

Ben Malkevitch, organ