

Lakewood Congregational Church,

A Congregation of the United Church of Christ

Sunday, May 24, 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 7th 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
- Call the church office at (216) 221-9555 to discuss other options

Let us worship God.

Prelude

Sure on this Shining Night by Samuel Barber
Naomi Columna, soprano; Ben Malkevitch, piano
(remote collaboration)

Call To Worship

(based on Ps 68)

Leader: We shout for joy
to God who rides upon the clouds!

All: We sing praises to our awe-inspiring God,
before whom the earth quakes,
and whose abundant blessings provide for all in need!

God is Sovereign over the earth,
Defender of the defenseless, and Parent to orphans;
God creates families for those who are alone.

**God leads captives to freedom
and breaks the yoke of oppression.**

God goes forth before the people,
marching through the wilderness of their lives,
bringing forth restoration and justice.

**Sing praise to God,
Rider of the ancient skies,
who dwells in holiness.**

Proclaim the power of God!
O God, how awesome you are in your sanctuary!
You give power and strength to your people.

Let us worship God!

Invocation

God Most High, we gather to honor and glorify you.
Receive our invitation to dwell with us.
Enfold us in your presence and
fill us again with holy awe and mystery.
We are yours and we claim you as our God. Amen.

Hymn *Blessed Assurance*

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

1. Bless-ed as-sur-ance, Je-sus is mine! O what a fore-taste of glo-ry di-
2. Per-fect sub-mis-sion, per-fect de-light, vi-sions of rap-ture now burst on my
3. Per-fect sub-mis-sion, all is at rest; I in my Sav-ior am hap-py and

vine! Heir of sal - va - tion, pur-chase of God, born of his
sight; an-gels de-scend-ing bring from a - bove ech-oes of
blest, watch-ing and wait-ing, look-ing a - bove, filled with his

Refrain
Spir - it, washed in his blood. This is my sto - ry, this is my
mer - cy, whis-pers of love. good-ness, lost in his love.

song, prais-ing my Sav - ior all the day long; this is my

sto - ry, this is my song, prais-ing my Sav-ior all the day long.

Pastoral Prayer

Today's scripture, I don't use very much in my sermon, but I do want to reflect on it in our time of prayer, because it is Jesus praying to God on our behalf. You'll hear Paula read it so beautifully in a moment, but Jesus concludes by saying, "Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one."

We know that we do not live in a world where all are one. We have lost our grasp on grace, and struggle to have respectful, caring, and open-hearted relationships with others with whom we may disagree or not relate to entirely. So I do pray that during this time God will protect us each, but also that God will help us to understand how to be one, how to be united, and how to care deeply for one another's needs, while also being willing to have hard conversations about what it will take to bring about a just world for all.

I do not want to become numb to the reality we find ourselves in right now. We are about to hit the 100,000 mark for coronavirus deaths in the U.S. In three months, we've lost that many lives, just in the U.S. That's the death toll of 9/11 every couple of days. Almost 2 times the US lives lost in Vietnam over 9 years. Almost as many as were lost in WWI in one year. Let's not allow ourselves to grow numb to the large numbers.

I also know it's Memorial Day Weekend, and we don't want to become numb to that reality either. And so we pray for the lives lost in war and we pray for a day when all will be one and war will be no more.

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.**
For those who lost their lives while fighting for our country, we remember in our memory on this Memorial Day. **Lord, hear our prayer.**
Holy Father, protect us in your name, that we may be one as you are one one with Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

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.

Call to Offering

Prayer of Dedication

Ever-present and loving God,
your Word tells us to cast our cares on you because you care for us. In faith and trust we present these gifts, and ourselves, to you. Bless and multiply them to meet the needs, both hidden and apparent, of your beloved ones. Inspire each of us to live as Christ's witnesses, today and ever more. By the power of the Holy Spirit, we pray. 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 Paula Deal

John 17:1-11

After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed. "I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking

on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one."

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.

All week long, I hear this question: How can I help?

We are a church of doers. We are a hands-on people. We want to show the change we are making in the world. We want to list community services on our resumes and post about them on our social media. We want to say to our friends and family, "I spent the whole day feeding the hungry and clothing the naked and visiting the prisoner and giving drink to the thirsty and welcoming the lonely and the stranger into my home." We want to say, "look at all the good I am doing. How clear it is that I am a good person! Everyone knows I'm a hard worker because of the work I do!"

How can I help? And it is so incredibly difficult for us right now that the answer is so often, "you can help by doing nothing." Stay safe. Stay home. Stay connected.

This is against everything our hardworking hearts and minds and hands know how to do. Our muscle memory shows us that we are doers. And today we're being asked to not do. Hear me when I say that every single day I feel as if I'm not doing enough to advocate for the poor and marginalized in our communities. I have an ear that is keenly in tune with the cries of the earth and the cries of the poor, and when I lay down at night and try to sleep, I hear the sigh of the Earth which is relieved by the breath she is able to take when humans slow down, and I hear the cries of the poor who are disproportionately affected by Covid-19. I hear the cries of those with underlying health conditions and comorbidities and the reality of this plague's unequal toll on people of color. I hear the cries of our vulnerable communities who are saying "the safety nets had too many holes before and they have too many holes now." Hear me when I say that every day I ask the question, "how can I help?" and the response that is given to me is not the one I want. The response is, "Stay safe. Stay home. Stay connected."

And in the midst of it, in the midst of staying home, I feel swamped and overwhelmed by the negativity of our polarized news cycle, our polarized families, our polarized faith communities. So today what I want to do is amplify some stories of some people who are doing incredible work in Cleveland and Lakewood right now. Because it is clear to me right now that God is calling me to stay home with my family, and to Witness to the good that is happening out there.

Babies and Brunch:

Yvonka Hall is the founder and executive director of the Northeast Ohio Black Health Coalition. She has been called by God to fill the gaps in our systems, so when the Cleveland Metropolitan School District made arrangements to feed

children during the pandemic, she saw that those arrangements did not make special provisions for handicap accessibility or children under the age of 9. So she launched the Babies and Brunch program. She and a small team – including two of her nieces, roughly ten donors, and 20 drivers – began feeding 71 children three meals a day, seven days a week. Over time, donations of soap and toilet paper were added. And back at Easter, candy, donated by a local CVS, enabled Babies and Brunch to give the children Easter baskets. When asked the question, "how can Christians help in this season of great suffering?" Yvonka responded by filling a gap, especially for those whose parents or grandparents weren't physically able to access the food that was provided by the school district.

Building Hope in the City:

Building Hope in the City is an organization we love to partner with here at LCC. Their mission is one I love: Advance the good of the city. Magnify the mission of Jesus. Unleash the capability of underestimated people.

Building Hope found ways to continue their after-school tutoring sessions via Zoom, helping those without adequate access to the internet to find connectivity, and delivering Blessing Bags on a weekly basis to the families they tutor. They also began a new partnership with Metro West Community Development Organization and Councilwoman Santana to begin calling and connecting thousands of elderly people within the Clark-Fulton/Stockyard neighborhoods to needed resources like groceries and technology help, and simply to know that they are not forgotten and they are not alone.

I could go on and on about Building Hope in the City and their branch, The Hope Center for Refugees and Immigrants, and the ways in which they have helped the refugee and immigrant community gain access to resources, file for

unemployment, apply for jobs, and even offering grants to families in need.

Spaces art gallery:

The Cleveland nonprofit art gallery, Spaces, provided 60 artists with \$1,000 emergency relief grants earlier this spring to soften hardships caused by the global coronavirus pandemic. Now, they are accepting applications for a second round of \$50,000 in grants for at least 50 more artists. Funding is coming from the Cleveland Foundation.

Similarly, the Cleveland Chamber Choir is offering grants for musicians and developing some really wonderful video music content.

Youth Opportunities Unlimited:

Youth Opportunities Unlimited is a nonprofit workforce development organization based in Cleveland, Ohio that serves teens and young adults ages 14-24 living in economically distressed areas in Northeast Ohio. Each year they have a Career Olympics for their students, and when it was canceled because of Covid-19, they hosted it online, giving students a chance to film their stories and be proud of their gifts, and continue to develop their skillsets for their future careers.

Teachers:

Our teachers. Oh Church, our teachers. I cannot begin to tell you the efforts they have gone to to support our children during this giant upheaval. Speaking only from my own home, I can tell you that my daughter's teacher called his class on video chat every morning to tell them that everything is okay, that they're not alone, and that he is right there for them as they work through their course load. I have heard stories of so many other teachers who have done the same.

Our community also came together for our graduates, through Erie Design, putting together signs to put in our yards, the yards of our seniors and eighth graders and those going through transition years funded by memories of our community to support our students, to support a small business, and to support one another (Julie Warren wrote up a beautiful story about that and I will share it on our blog).

Food Pantries:

From Trinity Lutheran Church's pantry and to-go meals, to our monthly to-go meal, to the food delivery program at West Park UCC, and so many more... I cannot even begin to list them all, our communities are living and breathing the good work of Loving our Neighbors.

For every story I am telling there are dozens and dozens more. And yet we may still feel like we're not doing enough. What I really want you to understand is that there will be a time for us to really put our boots on the ground and do some hard and beautiful work. This pandemic and its long term effects are not going to run out soon. So please, be at peace with what you are able to do today and what will equip you with the energy to do what we will need to do tomorrow... whatever that is, even if, maybe especially if, what you are able to do today is nothing.

When you ask the question, "How can I help?" that answer is different for every person. Some of you have jobs and identities that call you to a specific way of helping. Some of you have family you tend to who keep you very well occupied. But for many of you, I want to say that the answer to the question "How can I help?" Is: stay home.

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said, "We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly." When he spoke those words, he didn't think of the spread of a virus. Before now, this statement may have inspired us to

connect to one another, to help, to meet needs, to be the hands and feet of the world so that the impact we make on social distance in the face of a virus that uses that inescapable network of mutuality to find itself new homes. The simple fact is that when we are physically together, we are providing a pathway that can harm our neighbor.

Okay, I told you at the beginning that I wanted to point to the Good News stories, so I did that. I also said at the beginning that I was tired of divisiveness and polarization, and what I'm about to say is potentially divisive and polarizing, but The Spirit will not let me go without saying it. We have a saying in preaching that sometimes the Good News for one person might not be the Good News for another person, and yet we are called to preach the Good News. So here it is. This week I have really struggled with our state beginning to open up. I don't think it's time. While I hold an attentive ear to the wounds of our economy and the mental health of those who are lonely, it remains abundantly clear to me that when this virus spreads, which it will, it will continue to disproportionately impact our poor and black communities. I interpret the Gospel to always and every single time put the needs of the lost, the last, the least, the marginalized and the oppressed at forefront. So I believe the most faithful and Christian thing I can do right now is to stay home as much as possible, and to wear a mask when I go out. Because this virus might not hurt me. It might not damage my family. It might not even damage our church. "But we are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly." I hear the cries of the poor and marginalized communities and I know that while social distancing might not do much for me, it might just do something to protect the people who are letting out the cries.

When you stay home, what you're doing is powerful. You're saying "No, I will not give this virus a pathway to harm my neighbor."

one might grow into the impact we have on all. It is this same statement that, reading it now, reminds us of the need to

Beloved, we worship a God who redeems. I trust in God to write stories of redemption for our small businesses, for our schools, for our athletes, for our musicians, for our artists, for our children and for our elderly, for the unemployed and those who are losing tips and commission. I trust in God to write stories of redemption for every single community that is impacted. I trust in God to write stories of redemption for the systems that have led to disproportionate pain. I trust that when we look back on this time in 5 years, we will know that when we stayed home and stopped the spread, we saved the lives of God's beloved children.

When it's hard, look for the good news stories. Look for the helpers. Reach out to connect with someone and be a part of one of these many amazingly creative ways that we are building community right now. This is temporary, and you're not alone.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Benediction

Ever-present and loving God,
your Word tells us to cast our cares on you because you care for us.
In faith and trust we present these gifts, and ourselves, to you.
Bless and multiply them to meet the needs,
both hidden and apparent, of your beloved ones.
Inspire each of us to live as Christ's witnesses,
today and ever more.
By the power of the Holy Spirit, we pray. Amen.

Postlude

Imagine by John Lennon
Chris Burns, vocals and guitar; Tim Hampton, marimba

