

Lakewood Congregational Church,

A Congregation of the United Church of Christ

Sunday, May 31, 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 this Pentecost Sunday. 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."

- Today we are not going to have a Facebook Live coffee hour at 11:00 because Lakewood is having a graduation car parade at noon, and we know that many people in our community will be participating. On that note, next Sunday we will be recognizing our graduating seniors--high school, college, trade school, grad school, and so on. If you have not heard from us but you have a graduate or are a graduate, please reach out so we can include you.
- Let us worship God.

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

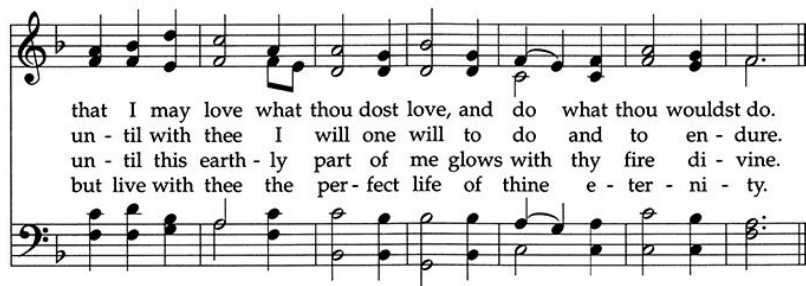
O Healing River by Fran Minkoff and Fred Hellerman
Ben Malkevitch, piano

Hymn *Breathe on Me, Breath of God*

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



1. Breathe on me, Breath of God, fill me with life a - new,
2. Breathe on me, Breath of God, un - til my heart is pure,
3. Breathe on me, Breath of God, till I am whol - ly thine,
4. Breathe on me, Breath of God, so shall I nev - er die,



that I may love what thou dost love, and do what thou wouldst do.
un - til with thee I will one will to do and to en - dure.
un - til this earth - ly part of me glows with thy fire di - vine.
but live with thee the per - fect life of thine e - ter - ni - ty.

Call To Worship

Amazed and astonished
where those who gathered
in the name of a gift-giving God.
Amazed and perplexed
where those who did not understand each other
finding themselves praising God together.
On Pentecost we join the original Ring of Fire
celebrating the foundation of the universal Church
the birth of the Body of Christ.
Are we ready to be amazed?
Are we ready to be astonished?
Are we ready to be perplexed?
Come Holy Spirit, Come!
Surprise us and move us.
Heal us and change us. Amen.

Faith Formation Teacher Recognition, Rachel Burns

Thanks to:

Nursery Helpers-- Jacqueline Reasor, Lee Mechenbier, Cameron Wereb, Andy Barlow, Maic D'Agostino
Pre K-5th Grade-- Melissa Armstrong-Brine, Kate Dailey, Melissa Diemert, Stephanie and Chris Fries, Amber Kramer, Kim Mitchell, and Jen Murray
6th-12th Grade-- Mike and Sarah Banyasz, Aaron Hill
Subs and Helpers-- John Bando, Paul Pierce, Jill Richardson, Lindy Warren

Pastoral Prayer

Let us pray not only for Christ's Church but for all humans on earth. Today, let us allow the pain of human separation and violence to rise in consciousness that we may offer this suffering to God. May our prayers ripple out from the personal to our households, through our neighborhoods and communities, among the nations around the globe, and out

into the vast cosmos. May God's Holy Spirit come and fill all of us with an inclusive and surprising sweet, sweet Spirit. Take a moment to pause and offer up your prayers.

And then I'll pray the prayer attributed to St. Francis of Assisi, and lead into our Lord's Prayer:
Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love,
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light;
And where there is sadness, joy.
O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to understand,
to be loved, as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive,
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

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

I want to provide an update about our Coronavirus Assistance Fund. We have about \$6000 in the Coronavirus Assistance Fund right now, and have distributed small amounts to two people. We feel that this fund will fill many long-term needs as we are just beginning to see the impact of unemployment

and underemployment. We are grateful for all who have contributed. We also want you to know that your financial contributions have allowed our church to continue our mission and ministry in ways that we would not otherwise be able to do and we are extremely grateful. As you are able, we invite you to continue that support so that we can do the work of God through this church.

Prayer of Dedication

Blow the dust off our fears, Generous Spirit, so we might be more giving people. Blow the dust off our material gifts we think are so paltry, so we might realize how they can bring hope and life to others. Blow the dust off our mistaken views of others, so we might see them as our sisters and brothers, ready to grace us, even as we may bless them with these offerings. In Jesus' name, 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: Acts 2:1-21, a creative video by the D'Agostino Family

When the Day of Pentecost came, the disciples all gathered together in one place. Suddenly a sound, like a powerful gust of wind, came howling out of nowhere and filled the whole building. Then, tongues of fire appeared over the heads of those gathered. Like a wildfire, the Holy Spirit moved through them. They started speaking in many different languages, filled with the power of the Spirit.

That day, Jews from all over the world were staying in Jerusalem. When they heard the sound, they came running to see what had happened. Hearing the disciples speaking their own mother tongues, they were thunderstruck. They couldn't for the life of them figure out what was going on, and kept saying, "Aren't these all Galileans? How come we're hearing them talk in our various mother tongues?"

Parthians, Medes, and Elamites;
Visitors from Mesopotamia, Judea, and Cappadocia,
Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia,
Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene;
Immigrants from Rome, both Jews and proselytes;
Even Cretans and Arabs!

"They're speaking our languages, saying "GOD IS GOOD!"

Their heads were spinning; they couldn't make head or tail of any of it. They talked back and forth, confused: "What's going on here?"

Others joked, "They must be drunk on wine."

That's when Peter stood up and, backed by the other disciples, spoke out: "Fellow Jews, listen carefully and get the story straight. These people aren't drunk as some of you suspect—it's only nine o'clock in the morning.

"No, let me tell you something: This is what the prophet Joel announced would happen:

"In the Last Days," God says,

"I will pour out my Spirit

on every kind of people:

Your sons will prophesy,

also your daughters;
Your young men will see visions,
your old men dream dreams.
When the time comes,
I'll pour out my Spirit
On those who serve me, men and women both,
and they'll prophesy.
I'll set wonders in the sky above
and signs on the earth below,
Blood and fire and billowing smoke,
the sun turning black and the moon blood-red,
Before the Day of the Lord arrives,
the Day tremendous and marvelous;
And whoever calls out for help
to me, God, will be saved."

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.

Okay so I have to tell you that creating that video with my family saved me this week. Well, Maic created most of it, really. I hope that watching it has been fresh air for you. I hope you'll watch it again, too. We're going to put a separate video of just that Acts production on the Youtube page, so you can share that link with your family and friends if you'd like.

I have felt many times in the past few months that Creativity is the winner of the pandemic. When we can invite creative ways of thinking into our lives, we are able to reimagine ways of connection to one another, to God, and to our own souls. Our separation is requiring us to think of creative ways of living and being in the world, and to step out of our comfort zones to imagine a new way of thriving. When I talk about creativity, I'm talking about art and music and theatrics and writing, but I'm also talking about being creative about the ways in which we connect to others-- being creative about Zoom meetings and social distancing, about collaboration, about prayer and building your spiritual life with God. I am praying that God can continue to help our church and our individuals and our families be innovative, creative, and adaptive.

This is temporary. It feels like a long temporary right now, and we will be forever changed, but the hard part is a temporary part. So continue to be innovative and creative and adaptive. I'm so proud of you all for what you are doing.

On that note, I want to let you know that starting on Monday I am taking two full weeks off. I'm tired in the deepest part of my soul. Since mid-March, I have been pastoring, parenting, and pandemic-ing the best I know how, while also navigating the needs of my extended family and remaining in tune with the pain of the world. Additionally, this morning we learned that my Gramma has Covid-19 and is hospitalized, and I need to turn my energy towards my family as we navigate the unknown future here.

I'm telling you this publicly for two reasons: one, so that you know I'm taking the next two weeks off. Pastor Sara will be on-call for me, but the church office will also be available to direct your needs as they arise. We will still have Virtch, and I promise that it will be worship that Glorifies God, and we will still have a church community building in creative ways

because we're blessed with Ben and Rachel and Karen and Darren and our Exec Team and other volunteers. We need you here at Virtch... and I'll be here, on my couch drinking coffee and worshipping with you... because we need this community more than ever right now. Creativity is the winner of the pandemic, and when we gather in our homes, and pray a prayer across time and space it is bringing Glory to God in a way that will save us. We need you to sing. We need you to pray. We need you to gather in your home with us in our homes. I believe that this creative gathering is a uniquely powerful and radical act of prayer and loving our neighbor.

The second reason I'm saying it publicly is because I hope to model Sabbath for you. Sabbath is a commandment, it is not a suggestion. Sabbath is not: "if you can afford to take a break, you should take a break." God gave us a commandment to rest and replenish our souls. God modeled that rest for us when God created this world: on the seventh day, God rested. God stopped and looked at all that God had done, and saw that it was good, and in seeing it God had what God needed to move forward. That's what I need right now and I can name a few... dozen... of you who need it too. Because we cannot pour from an empty cup. So I hope you will find ways to take Sabbath too. For the next two weeks I will be with my family, I will carve out intentional time for prayer and reflection, and grief if that's a season I need to enter. I will work with God to tune my heart to sing God's grace, and when I come back I will have the energy to hear what the Spirit is saying to the church as we continue to navigate these times.

Okay? Thank you for your Grace.

Now, let us pray. 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.

Our scripture reading starts this way: they were all together in one place.

Oh.

Well. Nothing relatable here.

The writer and theologian Debie Thomas redeemed this opening for me, though, and I offer it to you. She writes, “But in another sense, we are in one place. We are in a hard place. A hollow place. A place of vulnerability and grief. We are together in our uncertainty. Together in our loss. Together in our hopes and fears. Across all sorts of distances – geographical, cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic – we are bound together as one people, one humanity, one planet, facing a common threat that knows no borders.”

I don’t know, actually, if the common threat Debie Thomas is talking about is the storyline of racism and discrimination or if the common threat she’s talking about is the storyline of Covid-19. I’m not sure it matters. We’re together in one place. A hard place.

Perhaps you have seen that phrase going around: “we are not all in the same boat, but we are all in the same storm.” I invite you to sit with that phrase for some time too. The boats we are in are different. Some of us are alone in our homes, some are navigating parenting. Some of us are navigating the care of aging parents or aging spouses. Some are navigating the loud absence of grandchildren running through our homes. Some are navigating unemployment or underemployment. Some are navigating illness and grief. Some are navigating the deep pervasive fear and pain of racism and for some of you that pain is as close as your own body or as close as your own partner, or as close as your own children.

But we are together in one storm. One place. A hard place.

The Pentecost story is a beautiful one. It is the story of people from many different boats coming together to a common liberation. They speak many different languages, they understand the world in many different ways, they face many different obstacles and pains, but when they come together to this place, they hear the common language of God’s liberating love.

In our video we hear them say, “They’re speaking our languages, saying “GOD IS GOOD!”

There are a couple very visceral elements going on here in our Pentecost story, and those same visceral elements are ones that we see on the news today. They mean something different, but they are the same image. Let me explain.

We hear of the breath-- that powerful breath of wind. We’re all thinking a lot about breath these days. From the breath our beloved ones are losing through Covid-19 and the need for ventilators and breathing treatments, to the breath we heard George Floyd cry out for this week across the news. We are hearing a desperate cry for breath. We’re talking about where we breathe and how we can possibly breathe through these masks. Breathing, these days, feels like a privilege. Like a luxury.

“Suddenly a sound, like a powerful gust of wind, came howling out of nowhere and filled the whole building.”

Another Joanna-- Joanna Haradar, a Mennonite pastor in Kansas, wrote these powerful words this week: “As we read about the wind—the breath—of the Holy Spirit rushing through the earliest believers, we remember that God’s breath is the source of ours. As we read that they all began to speak in other languages, we remember that the purpose of our God-given breath is to connect us to each other—not to divide us.”

God's breath is the source of ours. Beloved, as long as God breathes we breathe. In joy and in sorrow God is the source of our breath. In loneliness and in connection God is the source of our breath. In life and in death God is the source of our breath.

And then there's fire. Minneapolis is on fire, I don't know what the status will be when this sermon is played on Sunday morning, but I know that right now Minneapolis is on fire. And like a wildfire the spirit moved through the disciples. Breath and fire fill our news cycles just as breath and fire fill our scripture today.

The Pentecost fire, though, is the fire of the Holy Spirit igniting under us or over us or around us but it is a fire that does not capture us or consume us... it is a fire that liberates us. It is a fire that disrupts us in our weariness and our fear and our pain and shines a light on a new way forward. It is a fire that magnifies and orients us towards a radical new way of engaging God and our neighbor.

With the fire and breath of the Spirit, these siblings from across cultures, from different boats, from so many different understandings of the world, they come together and they hear in their languages: God is Good-- and, just as an aside, I love that they don't hear these words in the same language together. I love that they hear these words in their own languages all at the same time. I think that's more beautiful; there's a beauty and affirmation of their diversity and I think God loves that.-- Anyway they come together and they hear God is Good and, on fire and filled with breath, they begin to prophecy of a better world: your sons and your daughters will prophecy-- and let me tell you that the children at Lakewood Congregational Church are prophets... and your young people will see visions-- and let me tell you that the young people at LCC are seeing visions of a better future... and your old people will dream dreams and let me tell you that the wisdom of our

elders could fill novels and broaden our dreams beyond imagination... and when God pours out God's spirit upon us, upon God's people, upon the Body of Christ... when God pours out that breath and that fire, the work of God through us is tremendous and marvelous and it is liberating.

We are all in one place. It is a hard place. But if we are open to it, if we prepare ourselves for it, we will find that God is doing something with us while we are in this place. I feel from the bottom of my heart that the Church of Jesus Christ is experiencing a Reformation right now. I feel that we will not ever go back to quite what we were before. I don't know what we're going to become but I think it's going to be marvelous. Open your ears to hear what the Spirit is doing with us.

This Pentecost flame is a liberating flame and this wind is a liberating breath.

This is a liberating room in which we gather and our creative and innovative way of gathering is liberating.

This is a liberating hearing of languages, a liberating understanding of one another, a liberating openness to God's movement in our lives.

On Pentecost, the church is born. I see you, church. I see our birth. I see the rush of wind, I see the fire, I see the liberation. And I feel beyond blessed that when we gather in one literal place again, we will have weathered this storm and we will be experiencing this creative reformation together.

Until then, beloved, gathered church-- God is Good. Open your heart to receive the spirit, the breath, the fire. Tune your heart to sing God's grace.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Benediction

The shutters of our hearts have been flung open by the fresh breath of God! Let us go to offer God's love to everyone around us even if only from our living room or porch. Our souls have been lit with a liberating fire. We will go to share visions of hope, to listen to the dreams of the oppressed, even if only through social media, a text, or a phone conversation. Our loneliness and fears will be set aside by the Spirit of inclusion creating community. We will speak words of peace to all we meet even while maintaining a safe distance, we will open ourselves to the gifts of others even as we cocoon in place because we love them. Go forth in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, One God, Mother of us All.

Postlude

Ev'ry Time I Feel the Spirit, arr.

Ben Liu, tenor; Noah Hamrick, bass; Ben Malkevitch, piano
(remote collaboration)