

# Lakewood Congregational Church,

*A Congregation of the United Church of Christ*

Sunday, June 21, 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 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 are 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

Prayer by Leslie Adams

Matt Jones, tenor; Lavert Stuart, piano

## Hymn *They'll Know We Are Christians*

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

## Call To Worship

One: The sun shines more brightly.  
Its warmth stays with us for so many more hours.

All: **So we shake free of our old ways.**

One: In this new moment,  
We may find ourselves in the wilderness:  
Hoping God will open our eyes  
Praying God will make us worthy  
Wanting to grow with God.

All: **Let us grow together in the  
wild ways of our God.**

## Scripture Reading

Matthew 10:24-39

24 "A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master; 25 it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher, and the slave like the master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household! 26 "So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. 27 What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. 28 Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. 29 Are not two sparrows

sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. 30 And even the hairs of your head are all counted. 31 So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows. 32 "Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; 33 but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven. 34 "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. 35 For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; 36 and one's foes will be members of one's own household. 37 Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; 38 and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. 39 Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.

## 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.

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 took two weeks off from preaching during perhaps two of the most transformational weeks of our nation in my lifetime. I don't even know where to start.

So I'm going to do something that I made up. It's called Sermon Sliders. So, you know when you order three tiny burgers instead of one big burger at the restaurant and

they're called sliders. That's it. So, sermon sliders, tiny sermons. And I have three of them.

The first sermon slider is about how the lives of the elderly matter to God.

The second one is about racism.

The third is just a quick note about doing the best you can.

Okay. So:

You are our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

The last time we found ourselves gathered in this way, I expressed some lament and fear about my Gramma's health, so I feel like I should update you, but I also want to talk a bit more about what it means to love someone in their dementia, and about how valuable human life is. So, my Gramma tested positive for Covid-19 and is now testing negative, and she was always asymptomatic. Thanks be to God. We found out about the Covid-19 because she was tested when she fell and broke her hip, and subsequently had surgery, and she is back to the nursing home doing rehab and healing. Thanks be to God.

When I talk about my Gramma, I do it because I know that so many of you resonate with these stories-- because of your parents, your grandparents, your spouses, or even yourself. And also because the elderly are a part of this vulnerable population that we are working so hard to protect right now.

Our scripture passage today is a bit of a tough one to hear, and I'll get into that shortly, but for now I just want to pull out this one phrase: "do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows."

My Gramma's primary dream in life is to be surrounded by her family at every possible moment. Everything is perfect when all of her chicks are in the nest. Her decline into dementia really sped up when lockdown started. She is among the many many people in congregate living care who are unable to visit face to face with family for the time being. She is confused and she is angry that when her only desire in the world is to be with her family, we aren't showing up. She

doesn't get that we can't show up; she thinks that we're choosing not to be there with her. She doesn't understand that the reason we're not there is because she is more valuable than many sparrows, and her life is worth protecting.

One of the most meaningful elements of my ministry is that I get to walk with people in and through the end stages of their lives. I get to love people in their dementia and other types of decline. I want you to hear that very clearly-- it's not about loving people in spite of their dementia, it's about loving people in their dementia. I have so many great stories to tell-- Those who hardly respond but still glow with a knowingness when they hear the Lord's Prayer spoken to them, or in my Gramma's case right now, she doesn't always know if I'm her sister or her daughter or her granddaughter, but she knows that my voice on the phone is the voice of someone she loves. When we talk, whether she forgets it 5 minutes later or not, we are writing a story together that matters in that moment and I cherish that. I don't focus on, "will she remember this?" or "when will I be able to embrace her again." I focus on, "this moment I have with her-- on the phone or looking through a glass window-- matters. It matters to her and it matters to me." Because in their dementia, they are still more valuable to God than many sparrows. Their lives matter to God. And their lives matter to us.

And so as followers of Christ, living in this particularly difficult time, we have to be careful about a narrative that can come dangerously close to placing economic value instead of precious, in-the-image-of-God human value on the lives of the vulnerable. In an extreme way, this narrative happened a few weeks ago when the lieutenant Governor of Texas suggested that senior citizens might take a chance on survival in exchange for keeping the legacy of our country intact. This is a dangerous and closed-minded narrative and it is not of God. My Gramma, and so many people in this dear Body of Christ that is Lakewood Congregational Church, are not a sacrifice. You are more valuable than many sparrows and we need you healthy on the other side of this.

Pray, wait, trust, show up for each other in whatever creative way you can figure out how to do that-- on the phone or in letter-writing or through a window, or when we can safely visit outside-- and trust that the showing up mattered, the protecting matters, and the moment matters.

Thanks be to God for each and every one of our beautiful lives. Amen.

You are Our Rock and Our Redeemer. Amen.

Last week we heard a mighty word from my friend Pastor Quincy from Lee Road Baptist Church. I am so thankful for the opportunity for our community to be welcomed and enriched by his interpretation of the Gospel and the ways in which he explained that Black Lives Matter. I really need you to watch that service if you haven't already. It is important to our church that you do that. So please let me know if you need help accessing it.

I also want to refer you back to the sermon I preached last Summer on Rejecting Racism, because it stands true and might help you to remember the ways in which these conversations on racism are directly linked to our calling as followers of Jesus Christ.

The title of this sermon slider is "Shalom or bust." It's like, "don't settle for anything less than Shalom."

It's a part of a larger quote I'll read to you in a moment, speaking about this part in our passage today that is really a difficult one to wrestle with: Jesus says, "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword." I read this and I think, shoot, that's against everything I ever learned in Sunday School. Jesus is the prince of peace. Peace is the answer, peace is the way. I have been taught forever to keep the peace, to calm the chaos, to avoid the conflict. And here, in Matthew 10:34, my man Jesus says, "I have not come to bring peace but a sword."

What am I supposed to make of that?

Stop, for a moment, to think of how this resonates with what we see in the news right now regarding racial tension. I specifically hear the voice of Rev. Dr. King in his Letter from a Birmingham Jail when he says, "the great stumbling block in the stride toward freedom are those... who prefer a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice." And I think that when Jesus says, "I have not come to bring peace to the earth" what he means is that he is not going to perpetuate the negative peace which is the absence of tension. He is going to push for the positive peace, which is the presence of justice.

One of my favorite theology writers who I've quoted before, Debi Thomas, she writes on her weekly lectionary blog: "his words are a necessary reminder that the peace Jesus offers us is not the fake peace of denial, dishonesty, and harmful accommodation. His is a holistic, truth-telling, disinfecting peace. The kind of deep, life-changing peace that doesn't hesitate to break in order to mend, and cut in order to heal.

Jesus will name realities we don't want named. He will upset hierarchies we'd rather keep intact. He will expose the lies we tell ourselves out of cowardice, laziness, or obstinacy. And he will disrupt all dynamics in our relationships with ourselves and with each other that keep us from wholeness and holiness. This is not because Jesus wants us to suffer. It's because he knows that real peace is worth fighting for.

Consider the fact that Jesus forced choices from just about everyone he met during his years of incarnate ministry. No one met him without feeling compelled to change. He consistently brought people to the point of crisis, tension, movement, or transformation. He consistently led people to decisions their families and communities didn't understand. Still, the status quo held no sway over him; his project was shalom or bust." I'm still quoting Debi Thomas... bear with me. "And so I have to ask myself: when was the last time my faith "divided" me? When was the last time I allowed Jesus to bring me to a point of saving crisis? When was the last

time my faith life encouraged holy division, holy change, in someone else's heart? In other words: what am I most invested in? My comfort or my salvation?"

An intersection of historical moments is happening to us right now. Four weeks ago, you heard me name the fact that Covid-19 is disproportionately impacting black communities. Last week, we heard Pastor Quincy name the pain of black people who face so many systemic injustices. Together, it has created this moment of deep reflection and transformation for our society, and we have to ask this question that Debi Thomas asked, "What are we more invested in. Our comfort or our salvation?" Don't miss the transformation. Don't shut it down.

Every day people ask me when we're going to physically come back to church on Sunday mornings. Trust me when I say that I want to know the answer to that question too. But I'm struck by this dynamic right now... you know I named my son Amos, after the prophet who said, from Amos chapter 5, "I hate, I despise your religious festivals; and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream."

Listen, I love worship. I love those religious festivals, I love the assemblies, I love the noise of the songs, but I have to remember that God says through the prophet Amos, "I don't want any of that-- it means nothing to me-- unless you are also going to let justice roll down like the waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream." It says something about our priorities when we have more questions about how we will gather again than we have questions about how we will seize this moment to bring about a just world for all. I want the question to be not "when will we gather again" but what is Lakewood Congregational Church doing to overcome the sin of racism in our society?

I'm gonna put a post-it note on my laptop and it's gonna say, "questions about opening" and "questions about anti-racism" and I'll track it for a week.

Shalom or bust. Shalom... doesn't mean peace. It's so much bigger than that. Shalom, in Hebrew means harmony, wholeness, completeness and we cannot have Shalom until our neighbor has Shalom. It's not the absence of tension, it's the presence of justice, but even more than that it's the presence of justice and then a movement forward from that place to what happens after all of God's people have experienced justice and are now whole, together.

I want to gather. I want to hear the noise of the songs. But more than I want to gather in this space, I want to witness God's shalom for every person-- for our gay siblings, for our trans siblings, for our black siblings, for our immigrant siblings, for our jobless siblings, for our autistic siblings, for our elderly siblings, for our addicted siblings, for our incarcerated siblings, for our handicapped siblings. More than I want to gather in this space, I want to witness God's shalom for every person.

Our scripture says, "For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and one's foes will be members of one's own household." I don't like that at all. On first glance, that's not the Jesus I know. The Jesus I know wants everyone to love everyone and get along with everyone. But on second glance it is the Jesus I know. Because it's the Jesus who calls us to have the hard conversations with each other that feel like conflict and tension for a while, but they are the hard conversations that disinfect us from our prejudice and our resentments and our closed-mindedness and eventually reveal, and expose, and bring forth from within us the presence of justice.

Shalom or bust. Thanks be to God.  
Amen.

You are our Rock and our Redeemer, amen.

This one's gonna be easier, I promise. And shorter.  
This one is just to tell you that I genuinely believe every one of us is doing the best that we can. And we are doing a hard thing.

We are all faced with the obstacle of understanding how and when and why to expand our quarantine bubbles. These conversations are perhaps even more divisive-- "I have come to set a man against his father and a daughter against her mother and a daughter in law against her mother in law"-- than the race conversation or the conversation about caregiving for the elderly.

If you feel that there is tension among your family about how to expand, please know that you are not alone. Seize the tension as an opportunity to grow your trust and transparency with the people you love. This is so specific that I don't want to dive too much more into it right now, and I certainly don't have answers about what's right for you, but I want you to know that I'm here for you to help you process your decision-making, and you can perhaps give me a call or write me an email about that.

(Just remember that if you ask me a question about the church opening, you have to also ask me a question about anti-racism or else you're gonna skew my post-it note tally).

I believe that everyone is doing the best they can right now about making social-distance related decisions, and I believe that everyone is doing the best they can right now to learn about and act upon racial injustice. This is a many gifts, one spirit moment. Some of us have the gift of speaking truth to power, some have the gift of sitting and listening. Some have the gift of comforting and others have the gift of disrupting and afflicting. Some have the gift of connecting and weaving, while others have the gift of telling stories and envisioning. When we combine all of our gifts together as the Body of Christ, we make something incredible. I think we make "Shalom or bust." Lakewood Congregational Church will not settle for anything less than a community that promotes God's wholeness for every single person.

Keep being amazing, Church. And don't give up. Thanks be to God. Amen.

## **Pastoral Prayer**

Fire our imagination  
O Holy Spirit of Wisdom!  
Help us to see beyond what is,  
to a vision of your kingdom.

Inspire us, revive us,  
that we might let go  
of trying to fix what is,  
to edit,  
as if our  
structures and institutions  
are templates for a slightly better future  
if only we fix them up a bit.

Instead, O God,  
teach us to walk in your ways,  
teach us wisdom  
teach us to heed the prophets  
of this and every age  
and fire our imagination  
for your kingdom's sake.

Then, O God,  
fire our wills,  
strengthen our communities,  
that we might be ready,  
be able,  
to do the work of realising  
what we imagine,  
that we might pray  
in word and deed,  
Your Kindom Come.  
Amen

## **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 trespasses (debts) as we forgive our trespass (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.**

## **Benediction**

God calls us from this time of worship, separate but together,  
Dispersed but united,  
to share the hope of abundant life in the presence of hardship,  
relationship that transcends the barriers of isolation,  
and to work for a world of peace and justice.  
Go in Peace in the Name of God who creates, redeems us, and  
sustains us.  
Amen.

## **Postlude**

*You Are with Us* by Ben Malkevitch  
Sung by LCC's Virtual Choir: Olivia Beal, Naomi Columna,  
Gwen Delaney, Elizabeth Frey, Kay Galloway, Meghan Galloway,  
Peter Hampton, Tim Hampton, Ben Liu, Noah Hamrick,  
Brian Skoog, Julie Warren, Lindy Warren, Robert Wenz; Ben  
Malkevitch, piano

## **From Our Music Director**

In usual times, we'd take a moment on the last Sunday of our choir season in May or June to honor everyone who's participated in LCC's music program for the last nine months. These are not usual times, but I still wanted to express my profound gratitude and joy for everyone who has made music in our Sanctuary and our virtual worship space this past year.

Whether singing, ringing handbells, playing other instruments, or any of the many other ways you all have contributed to our music program, you have enriched our worship together immeasurably.

Choir, I know none of us would choose to stand by ourselves with a microphone and headphones instead of in the Chancel, in *agape*, singing together, but given circumstances, we have adapted beautifully. Music will find a way; love will find a way. Because, COVID-19, you can't stop the beat.

I encourage everyone to reach out to an LCC musician you know well, or less well, and let them know you appreciate them.

Thanks, Ben Malkevitch