

Lakewood Congregational Church,

A Congregation of the United Church of Christ

Sunday, June 28, 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
- Call the church office at (216) 221-9555 to discuss other options

Let us worship God.

Prelude

Andantino in C Minor by Franz Ferling
David Kasper, alto saxophone

Call To Worship

Today's Call to Worship introduces our scripture for this week, which is about welcoming. The responses will be printed on your screen, but I also want to just let you know in advance that each time the response is: We welcome them, with the final response being Alleluia (because what an alleluia it is that we are a welcoming people). I also want to offer a thought before we go into the Call to Worship. As we sit in our homes, welcoming is a weird concept right now. We can't welcome people into our homes the way we could before, and for many of us that is a very hard thing. So I invite you to just think about what welcoming means for you right now-- welcoming someone into your heart, into a phone call, into a socially-distanced porch visit. The spaces we are creating right now for relationship are **real** spaces, even if they aren't typical spaces. So reframe your idea of "welcoming someone in" for a moment, and then join me in our Call to Worship.

Leader: God calls into our midst those who are beloved in all their diversity:

People: We welcome them.

Leader: God calls into our midst all those who are vulnerable, in need of listening, healing, shelter

People: We welcome them

Leader: God calls into our midst all those with a word of challenge that proclaims God's kingdom for all

People: We welcome them.

Leader: Let us worship God, who calls us to be "prophets of welcome":

People: Alleluia!

Invocation

Holy One, who calls us into community and invites us to welcome your prophets and messengers, let us experience your welcome to us gathered in various places but joined in this moment. Show us that we are beloved and honored in your presence and in this community. Show us how to put our resources at the service of all, help us know that the cup of water given in your name nourishes the one who gives and the one who receives. Satisfy our thirst to know your presence here and now. Amen.

Hymn *This Is My Song*

Ben Malkevitch, voice and organ

This is my song, O God of all the nations,
a song of peace for lands afar and mine.
This is my home, the country where my heart is;
here are my hopes and dreams, my holy shrine;
but other hearts in other lands are beating
with hopes and dreams as true and high as mine.

My country's skies are bluer than the ocean
and sunlight beams on clover leaf and pine;
but other lands have sunlight, too, and clover,
and skies are everywhere as blue as mine.
O hear my song, thou God of all the nations
a song of peace for their land and for mine

This is my prayer, O Ruler of all nations:
let thy reign come; on earth thy will be done.
In peace may all earth's people draw together,
and hearts united learn to live as one.
O hear my prayer, thou God of all the nations;
myself I give thee; let thy will be done.

Invitation to the Offering

We know the reward of God's welcome. The Holy Spirit has blown through us so that we sing of God's steadfast love continually. Now, gathered here as prophets of welcome, we respond to what God has done. We give our gifts of tithes and offerings in the certain hope that God's welcome will continue in the ministry we offer.

Dedication Prayer

Welcoming One, bless these gifts with your Spirit
Transform these gifts into the balm that your world needs.
In these gifts, may we welcome in a new world of love. Amen.

Scripture Reading

Matthew 10:40-42

40 "Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. 41 Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet's reward; and whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous; 42 and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple—truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward."

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.

- I. 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.
- II. Today's scripture is about welcoming, but it is also a passage about alignment: it's about aligning who and what

we welcome into our lives with our core values and mission. So what I'm going to talk about is how we have an opportunity in front of us to reassess what we are going to welcome back into our lives as we move forward from this time.

- III. Really early on in the pandemic, my family had to shift away from a lifestyle we were used to, where we had an average of 4 neighborhood kids plus our own in and out of our home every day after school. We loved being a house that children felt comfortable in, and even if I didn't love the messes and the inevitable fighting between children, we loved the Holy Chaos of friendships forming and childhood memories being made.
 - A. I joked with my neighbor about getting a welcome mat that said, "Warning: There are like... a lot of kids in here."
 - B. We also welcomed friends and family. I'm not the kind to prepare a great dinner and set the table beautifully and serve up multiple courses, but I love to welcome people into my home. I love sharing our space, sharing our stories, and... breathing the same air with people I love.
 - C. So, like it was for all of us, the shutdown was hard. I felt sad to turn people away, even if they understood the reason why, and didn't want to come over in the first place.
 - D. The concept of "welcoming" just shifted so drastically, and shutting down for a time has given us a chance to pause and think more intentionally about what we want to welcome into and let out of our homes going forward.
 - E. With our doors shut, and five of us living and working and schooling from home, tensions can get really high. It is a crowded house and when one person is in a bad mood, it tends to impact all of us and sometimes what we let out of our mouths is not love. So early on, when we had stopped welcoming people into our physical space, we made a sign.
 - F. The sign says, "Only love in. Only love out."

- G. Under stress, it had gotten really easy to let a lot of negativity into us, and a lot of resentment out of us... shame into us and anger out of us... Judgement into us, and hurtful words out of us... stress into us, and unfair demands out of us... So after a whole lot of that happened in our home, I started saying, “Only love in, only love out.”
 - H. It’s wayyyy oversimplified, of course. Because love, in its fullness, is not all passiveness and positivity and the absence of tension. Love in its fullness is still very hard. But “Only love in, only love out” was our way of checking ourselves to make sure that any words that came out of us were spoken from a place of love and grace, and that we would stop giving our time and energy to anything that wasn’t spoken out of love and grace. So that is a way that our family would like to move forward from this time... it’s really Kum Ba Yah, but I love it, and encourage you to adopt it too.
- IV. So today’s scripture, when it talks about welcoming, I am really intrigued by this repetitive poetry of welcoming something in the name of something: Welcoming Christ in the name of Christ, welcoming a prophet in the name of a prophet, welcoming a righteous person in the name of a righteous person-- here’s what I hear Jesus saying: we have to be mindful of aligning ourselves with that which we are willing to welcome into our lives. Jesus is saying we can’t welcome greed in the name of a prophet, we can’t welcome resentment in the name of the righteous one, we can’t welcome oppression in the name of Christ. Or... the other way around too. We can’t welcome a prophet in the name of greed. We can’t welcome a righteous one in the name of resentment. We can’t welcome Jesus in the name of oppression. In the same way that we only want to let love into and out of our home, who we welcome has to align with who we are and what we desire for our world. As Christians, who and what and how we welcome has to align with our vision for bringing about the Realm of God. This is about integrity and strongly aligned moral values.
- A. Only love in, only love out.
- B. But I’m really concerned about something. I’m concerned about how many of us are willing to welcome anybody and everybody else, no matter who they are or where they are on life’s journey, but we leave ourselves out on the front step knocking. You cannot love your neighbor as yourself unless you love yourself. You cannot welcome your neighbor as you welcome yourself if you don’t even let yourself in. And I think there is no better time than now to focus on aligning ourselves with ourselves, loving ourselves, trusting ourselves, seeing ourselves as made in the image of God, and eliminating from our lives anything that is preventing us from building up the Realm of God.
- V. I spend a lot of time thinking about the opportunity we’ve been given to stitch a new garment moving forward. You may remember I quoted Sonya Renee Taylor early on in our Virtch services-- actually I thought the quote was Brene Brown, and I released an apology for the misquote on Facebook, but it was Sonya Renee Taylor who said, “We will not go back to normal. Normal never was. Our pre-corona existence was not normal other than that 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.”
- A. With Sonya Renee Taylor’s quote in mind, I am wondering: what will we welcome into our lives moving forward? And more specifically, how will we ensure that what we welcome into our lives aligns with building up the Realm of God. Even more specifically, because most things start within ourselves, I want to ask you this question today: do you welcome yourself into your life? And do your actions, and your words, and your stewardship of time, talent, and treasure align with your own vision of a better world. Can you welcome your full self in the name of your own hopes and dreams and visions. Do you align with yourself?

VI. This is a kind of a dense question so I think I can clarify what I'm trying to say by telling a story. I've actually told you this story before but it's an important one to me. It's about one of the men who participated in Restorative Justice with me when I was facilitating a program in Wisconsin's prisons. He was in his early twenties and was one of the few men in our groups who was very open about his crime, almost as if the path to healing for him was to tell anyone and everyone what happened. So he told us that when he was four years old, his mother was killed by a drunk driver and he spent his whole life angry at that driver. He carried the baggage of anger around with him through his childhood and into adulthood and allowed anger to rule in his heart. And then, almost two decades later, he got behind the wheel far over the legal limit, with his best friend in the passenger seat, lost control and crashed the car, putting himself in a coma for several weeks. When he came out of the coma, he found out that his best friend had died in the crash. His best friend, the father of a four year old boy. Every week in Restorative Justice, in every way that he could slip it into conversation, he would tell us that he wished he'd died in that accident. He would say he wished he'd never woken up. That the earth was too good for him. That he didn't think he was worthy of receiving even the conditions of prison... that he didn't think he belonged in the course because there were other people who deserved to get in more than he did. He was tall with a toned, muscular build, but he carried himself in a very small way, almost as if he wanted to take up less space. 22 years old, he saw himself as the scum of the earth.

A. But he kept showing up. Week after week. I prayed every week that he would not take his own life before our next class, and felt a sense of relief whenever he walked into the chapel.

B. Near the end of the course, he brought in this butterfly that he wove out of the tiniest little beads that can be purchased at the prison canteen. Many of the men there enjoyed weaving beads as a hobby, rooted in Native American traditions and woven into the culture of the correctional

institution. When he was finished, we all admired the intricacy, patience, and small motor skills required to create what he called his sign of hope. And at the end of the course, when reflecting on what we learned this young man said, "I learned that I need to get myself on my own team." I need to get myself on my own team.

C. I think of that phrase so often, and about how frequently we are our own worst enemies. We see ourselves as unworthy of our own welcome. How often is it that we are fully aware of the never-ending grace of God, the unconditional love of family, the ongoing support of our church community, and yet we are standing aggressively against our own efforts to become better, fuller versions of ourselves. Moreover-- how often are we willing to welcome others into our lives, into our hearts, into our homes, and we would leave ourselves standing out on the front step? And yet we cannot love our neighbor as we love ourselves if we do not love ourselves.

VII. We are being given the opportunity to stitch a new garment. We are invited to welcome a prophet in the name of a prophet, a righteous one in the name of a righteous one, Christ in the name of Christ, and ourselves-- created in the Glorious image of God in the name of ourselves-- created in the Glorious image of God. What will you do in this time to make your behavior, your words, your stewardship align with the world you desire? And how will you welcome that fullest and most aligned self into your own life.

VIII. Now I want to talk about this "cup of cold water" part of the scripture.

A. A cup of cold water is something we need. Not something we want... not something that would be nice to have... it is something we need. Jesus says, "whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple--truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward." I believe you are all so good at giving a cup of cold water to someone in need. You are a servant

people, willing to give, to feed, to clothe, to heal, to offer up nourishment to people you love and even to people you don't. I saw many of you this Friday morning out at Lee Road Baptist Church handing out face masks and hand sanitizer-- needs, not wants-- to the community.

B. But I want to know in this time, will you give a cup of cold water to yourself? Will you give yourself what you need-- not what you want, but what you need-- welcome yourself in, nourish yourself so that you can become fully who God created you to be? I believe that God is calling us to study, to rest, to reflect, to pray, to breathe fresh air, to self-care and self-love in this time. To get ourselves on our own team. Only love in, only love out. And that if we all do it, we will stitch a new garment. One that aligns with who we are as followers of Christ. One that fits all humanity and nature.

C. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Pastoral Prayer

Gracious God of love,
we are grateful that you have revealed yourself to us,
each of us loved by you as children,
each of us precious in your sight,
each of us a reflection of you,
each of us bound together by love,
which is in fact your presence among us.

We come to you, O God,
weary and carrying heavy burdens.
Some of us bear the yoke of illness;
some of us bear the yoke of loss and grief;
some of us bear the yoke of caring for those who cannot care
for themselves;
some of us bear the yoke of unemployment or
underemployment;
some of us bear the yoke of hunger;

some of us bear the yoke of homelessness;
some of us bear the yoke of oppression or marginalization;
some of us bear the yoke of violence;
some of us bear the yoke of anger;
some of us bear the yoke of depression;
some of us bear the yoke of addiction.

From these and from so many other yokes, dear God,
we pray for rest;
we pray healing;
we pray for release;
we pray for wholeness.

God of all life,
may peace and justice fill our land
and, indeed, the whole world.
We pray this morning for the ongoing pandemic and all the
complexities of loneliness and loss within it, and for places
around the globe where people are victimized,
where safety is threatened,
where freedoms are denied,
where life is treated as anything less than sacred.

Gracious God,
grant us the yoke of Christ,
binding us together,
tethered by your love,
guided by your presence,
bringing your kingdom into this world.
It is for this kingdom that we now pray,
using the words Jesus taught us.
Our Father . . .

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.

Benediction

Whoever welcomes you welcomes me,
Quench our thirst for love,
Satisfy our need to be known,
Assure us that we are indeed prophets of welcome.
Let us go to proclaim this peace in God's name.

Postlude

Hyfrydol by Healey Willan
Ben Malkevitch, organ