

Lakewood Congregational Church Breathing in Welcome

June 28, 2020



Matthew 10:40-42, NRSV and The Message

⁴⁰“Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. ⁴¹Whoever 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; ⁴²and 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.”

⁴⁰⁻⁴² “We are intimately linked in this harvest work. Anyone who accepts what you do, accepts me, the One who sent you. Anyone who accepts what I do accepts my Father, who sent me. Accepting a messenger of God is as good as being God’s messenger. Accepting someone’s help is as good as giving someone help. This is a large work I’ve called you into, but don’t be overwhelmed by it. It’s best to start small. Give a cool cup of water to someone who is thirsty, for instance. The smallest act of giving or receiving makes you a true apprentice. You won’t lose out on a thing.”

♥ These verses follow last week’s Gospel passage. Jesus is commissioning, equipping, and sending his disciples into the world. And, he’s clear that there are risks. Risks to the disciples and the people who they train. Risks to people who believe Jesus is the son of God. Risks to those who support this ministry. Risks for the rewards of grace, eternal life, and the privilege to work with God while on earth.

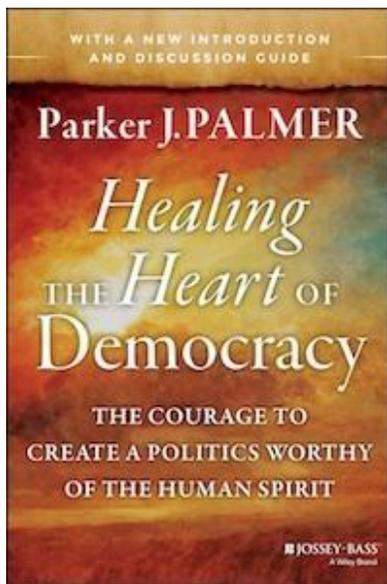
The Hebrew concept of *shaliah* creates a direct link between the original sender and the sender’s messenger. If you welcome the prophet Amos, then you welcome God, who sent Amos. If you welcome a member of the royal court, then you welcome the king or queen who sent them. The messenger and the sender are inextricably linked. So, if you welcome a disciple, you welcome Jesus and by welcoming Jesus, you welcome God. *Shaliah* is a First Testament concept that we embrace when we say that we are doing God’s work.

Did you notice that “welcomes” is used six times in the NRSV and “accepts” or “accepting” is used in The Message? Hospitality and generosity are foundational Hebrew and Christian concepts. And, it melds with *shaliah* because those concepts are intertwined. This is the last line of the LCC mission statement: *We declare this in the name of the Still Speaking God, whose Son, Jesus Christ welcomed all people into God’s circle of grace. Shaliah and hospitality connect us to God, to the ancient stories of our faith, to Jesus, and to the original disciples and apostles.*

What do we need to do to receive the reward of discipleship? What matters is that you recognize a need and offer to minister in God’s name. And, the entry level example for

this gift is a cup of water --- a simple and life-sustaining act suggested by the same Jesus who offered living water to the Samaritan woman.

- Using the concept of *shaliah*, who is a part of your cloud of witnesses?
- Share how you felt when someone offered you something like a cup of water.
- What is the difference between offering kindness as a disciple and just being kind?
- Where is extravagant welcome easy for you? Where is extravagant welcome difficult?
- Would you like to mentor or guide someone with the welcome that is comfortable for you? Would you like to learn how to offer a welcome in areas that are your growing edge?



♥ We are exploring *Healing the Heart of Democracy: The Courage to Create a Politics Worthy of the Human Spirit* as one part of the reflections in July and August. Today is the introduction. Each week will feature a summary, at least one short video, and often a song sung by Carrie Newcomer. This book, updated in 2014, may be ordered online or borrowed from a library. The accompanying videos and downloadable discussion questions are available, without cost, at www.couragerenewal.org. These reflections are also a guide.

Parker J. Palmer is a renowned educator, writer, speaker, activist, and spiritual leader. He leads transformational training in education, healthcare, nonprofits, churches, and leadership within corporations and government. Palmer advocates deep listening, a focus on the common good, the realization that every person and all of creation are worthy of respect and dignity, and engaging in the hard work needed to create a dynamic, just, and healthy society. I consider him one of the wisest leaders in our country.

Carrie Newcomer is a singer, songwriter and poet who has toured Europe, India and Africa, often as a cultural ambassador for the US State Department. Her music is in the American folk tradition. Finding the holy in every breeze and every situation are among her gifts. Newcomer and Palmer co-lead, *The Growing Edge*, an initiative to help people listen to the rustlings in their heart, discern them, and then act. Both are Quakers and that commitment to nonviolence, equality, and sacredness in all parts of life permeates their work. Additionally, Newcomer is one of Pastor Joanna's favorite musicians.

To start our focus, let's begin with the book's dedication because it sets the tone. Palmer dedicates his book to Christina Taylor Green, Addie Mae Collins, Denise McNair, Carole Robertson, and Cynthia Wesley, all girls. Christina died in 2011 in Tucson, Arizona while attending the event that seriously injured former Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords. Addie Mae, Denise, Carole and Cynthia died during the 1963 bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama. Palmer writes:

When we forget that politics is about weaving a fabric of compassion and justice on which everyone can depend, the first to suffer are the most vulnerable among us – our children, our elderly, our mentally ill, our poor, and our homeless. As they suffer, so does the integrity of our democracy.

- On which values is our democracy built?
- Which of those values help weave a fabric of compassion?
- Which values help the fabric to fray?
- Based on the Gospel passage, who have we welcomed and who is waiting for a cup of water?

Video - *Hope is Fueled by Human Connection* with Carrie Newcomer singing, "If Not Now, Tell Me When" <http://www.couragerenewal.org/democracyguide/v1/>

Video - *The Epigraph*: <http://www.couragerenewal.org/democracyguide/v3/>

The human heart is the first home of democracy. It is where we embrace our questions. Can we be equitable? Can we be generous? Can we listen with our whole beings, not just our minds, and offer our attention rather than our opinions? And do we have enough resolve in our hearts to act courageously, relentlessly, without giving up – ever—trusting our fellow citizens to join with us in our determined pursuit of a living democracy? Terry Tempest Williams

- How do you answer these questions?



♥ Within the UCC, today is Open & Affirming Sunday. Between COVID-19 and our national focus on race and antiracism, Pride Month has been quieter this year. LCC is an open & affirming congregation, which is a public covenant of welcome to the LGBTQ community. Even with that welcome, it is important to review what that covenant means, honor the ways justice has been achieved, and name the areas where justice needs advocacy. In our nation's recent history, we have been witnesses to overturned victories and the need for additional legal rulings.

These are some of the characteristics of an Open & Affirming congregation, followed by the LCC Mission Statement:

- A safe place for open and honest conversations about gender identity and human sexuality for people of all ages
- Embraces LGBTQ members and their family into the full life of the congregation
- Encourages LGBTQ members to serve and use their God-given gifts, whether in lay leadership or as ordained staff
- Celebrates same-sex marriage
- Advocates for LGBTQ civil rights and defends their LGBTQ neighbors when their dignity or safety is threatened

- Creates a welcoming environment for LGBTQ and questioning youth
- Welcomes meetings for support groups like Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG)

LCC's Mission Statement proclaims our common goal.

We strive to be a welcoming,
 worshiping community of faith,
 helping people discover and deepen their relationship with God,
 growing as disciples of Christ and reaching out in faith and loving service.

In keeping with the spirit of our Mission Statement,

Lakewood Congregational Church, United Church of Christ,
 is an Open and Affirming congregation.

We welcome people of all sexual orientation,
 ages, differing abilities, and ethnic, economic,
 and racial backgrounds into the full life and ministry of our church.

We declare this in the name of the Still Speaking God,
 whose Son, Jesus Christ welcomed
 all people into God's circle of grace.

- Where can you be more proactive in your support of the LGBTQ community?
- How can we, as a congregation, be more proactive in our welcome and in our advocacy?



♥ Listen to *Ours the Journey* sung by the virtual
 choirs of Edgewood United Church in East Lansing,
 Michigan and Haslett Community Church in Haslett,
 Michigan:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jMfvYl28qa4>

Rev. Julian Rush wrote the words and tune for this
 hymn. He is ordained with the United Methodist
 Church and has written about his experiences as a gay
 minister. He also served for more than ten years as
 the Executive Director of the Colorado AIDS Project.

This link provides more biographical information:
<https://lgbtqreligiousarchives.org/profiles/julian-rush>

In the midst of new dimensions, in the face of changing ways,
 Who will lead the pilgrim peoples wandering in their separate ways?

Refrain

*God of rainbow, fiery pillar, leading where the eagles soar,
 We, your people, ours the journey now and ever, now and ever, now and evermore.*

Through the flood of starving people, warring factions and despair
 Who will lift the olive branches? Who will light the flame of care?

Refrain

As we stand a world divided by our own self-seeking schemes
 Grant that we, your global village, might envision wider dreams.

Karen WagnerLakewood Congregational ChurchJune 28, 2020

Refrain

We are man and we are woman, all persuasions, old and young,
Each a gift in your creation, each a love song to be sung.

Refrain

Should the threats of dire predictions cause us to withdraw in pain,
May your blazing phoenix spirit resurrect the church again.

Refrain

- Where do you need to offer an olive branch or a flame of care?
- How is God's love song within you being sung?
- Where can the church be a blazing phoenix?
- How do you want to participate in earth-bound and God-sent resurrection?

♥ UPDATE: During their June 2020 meeting, the Lakewood Mayor, City directors and staff, and the Lakewood City Council committed to participating in the 21-Day Racial Equity and Social Justice Challenge organized by the YWCA.

<https://www.ywcaofcleveland.org/21-day-racial-equity-challenge/>

That antiracism resource was noted in our June 14 reflections, along with resources offered by the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American Culture & History. Links for sermons by Rev. Dr. Otis Moss III, Jr. are part of the June 7 reflections. All reflections are accessible on the LCC website. Whatever resource you use, please engage, reflect and participate in this conversation.

References and Images

Cup of water: <https://encrypted-tbn0.gstatic.com/images?q=tbn%3AANd9GcQdqbD-rgJaKVs5PnWT7psNVqftQIZAdf6eLg&usqp=CAU>

Parker J. Palmer: www.couragerenewal.org

Rainbow flag: <https://ak.picdn.net/shutterstock/videos/26372057/thumb/1.jpg>

Open & Affirming characteristics: ucc.org

Blazing Phoenix:

https://pbs.twimg.com/profile_images/674704728786255872/gln4eG1R_400x400.jpg

In the Midst of New Dimensions, UCC New Century Hymnal, #391

Title is *Ours is the Journey* in the Chalice hymnal.

Words and Music: Julian Rush, 1985.