

Lakewood Congregational Church

A Congregation of the United Church of Christ

Sunday, July 19, 2020

An Order of Worship to be followed in your home, along with our
worship video on your own
Preferably at 10:00am



Welcome and Announcements

Welcome to worship on this Sunday-- it's the . 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"

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, OH 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

“You Walk with Me” by David Yazbek

Peter Hampton, voice and piano

Call to Worship

Please join me in our spoken call to worship.

Leader: We come to celebrate God’s blessings to us.

People: Surely God is in this place!

Leader: We come to open ourselves to God’s guidance and love.

People: Surely God is in this place!

Leader: We come to see more clearly God’s presence in our lives.

People: Surely God is in this place!

Leader: We come to see God in this community of seekers.

People: Surely God is in this place!

Leader: We come to pray, praise, and offer ourselves to God.

People: Surely God is in this place! Let us worship!

Invocation

Holy One, you know us already. Help us to know you better.

Let us see you all around us. Fill our worship with your Spirit so that we may learn to recognize your presence in all places.

Amen.

Hymn

In the Bulb, There Is a Flower

Peter Hampton, voice; Ben Malkevitch, piano

(a remote collaboration)

Unison

1. In the bulb there is a flow - er; in the seed, an ap - ple tree;
2. There's a song in ev - ery si - lence, seek - ing word and mel - o - dy;
3. In our end is our be - gin - ning; in our time, in - fin - i - ty;

in co - coons, a hid - den prom - ise; but - ter - flies will soon be free!
there's a dawn in ev - ery dark - ness, bring - ing hope to you and me.
in our doubt there is be - liev - ing; in our life, e - ter - ni - ty.

In the cold and snow of win - ter there's a spring that waits to be,
From the past will come the fu - ture; what it holds, a mys - ter - y,
In our death, a res - ur - rec - tion; at the last, a vic - to - ry,

un - re - vealed un - til its sea - son, some - thing God a - lone can see.

WORDS and MUSIC: Natalie Sleeth, 1986

PROMISE
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Pastoral Prayer

Great God, loving Savior, Ground of our Being, grant us thankful hearts this day—for the gift of life itself, for the gift of new life, for the gift of a community of faith, for the beauty of this world, for the opportunity of summer, for family, for friends. Help us, even if only for a moment, to truly lift up our hearts, to imagine ourselves doing that—lifting up our hearts and turning them toward you—so that you can soften the many hard places and open us up to the love you have for each one of us.

We carry many burdens, and so we pray for those with worries about jobs and money and illness and isolation. Bring them a peace that passes all understanding and a hope that doors might open to new paths. For those with the challenges of care-giving for parents or for children with special needs, for those who face the challenge of decision-making about the school year, we ask for strength and for company and even for a sense of humor. For those with long-festering emotional wounds, we ask for a provision of grace and healing. We pray for people who are ill, that they might be healed, and we ask your loving saving presence with those who are in their last days of life. By the power of your Spirit make known to them the promise of eternity; make real to them the promises of faith.

O God, this world groans in need of you. Fear takes its hold, and suspicion takes over and people, for whatever reason, kill innocent people.

We pray for our president and national lawmakers, that they would hear one another and find a way to overcome this pandemic and more adequately provide for the poor and the

helpless, the aging and the disabled. Make our leaders bold in their creativity. Make them compassionate in their actions.

Patient God, you know we are a people in a hurry. We move through life so fast that we miss signs of your kingdom. They exist. They are ours to behold. So help us understand the kind of world you proclaimed for us in Jesus' patient teaching about the kingdom of heaven. Help us to see the signs and to be partners with you in making those signs visible. With grateful hearts, we are privileged to pray again the prayer Jesus taught his disciples, saying together, Our Father . . .

Invitation to the Offering

What we have received comes from seed sown in us by Jesus Christ. Having received the blessings of the harvest begun in us, let us return to God the fruits of the blessings we have received.

Dedication Prayer

Loving God, we offer back to you what we have been given: our treasure, our time, and our lives. Bless our gifts and multiply them for your purposes.

Scripture Reading, read by Rachel Burns

Common English Bible Version

Matthew 13:24-30

Jesus told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like someone who planted good seed in his field. While people were sleeping, an enemy came and planted weeds among the wheat and went away. When the stalks sprouted and bore grain, then the weeds also appeared.

“The servants of the landowner came and said to him, ‘Master, didn’t you plant good seed in your field? Then how is it that it has weeds?’

“‘An enemy has done this,’ he answered.

“The servants said to him, ‘Do you want us to go and gather them?’

“But the landowner said, ‘No, because if you gather the weeds, you’ll pull up the wheat along with them. Let both grow side by side until the harvest. And at harvest time I’ll say to the harvesters, ‘First gather the weeds and tie them together in bundles to be burned. But bring the wheat into my barn.’””

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 a 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. This morning on a Zoom call, just before I sat down to finalize my sermon for this week, Robert Wenz mentioned something about the year 1666, which was known as a Miracle Year for Isaac Newton and, by way of Isaac Newton, for our whole world, and how 1666 was also the time of the Bubonic plague. Robert’s comment really stuck with me, as I thought about the opportunity we have in front of us to weave a new garment and draw a new map ahead of us.

When I got off the call I researched a little more-- now first I want to say that Isaac Newton is... not my area of expertise... so I might sound a little silly explaining this to some of you who have studied this a whole lot more than me, but I want to make a point here down the line about the Parable Jesus shared with us in the Gospel of Matthew, so just hang in there.

I learned that there is a latin phrase: Annus mirabilis-- the wonderful year, the miraculous year, the amazing year. The term was originally used to refer to the year 1666, but today it is used to refer to several years that were particularly monumental. The year 1666 marked the peak of Isaac Newton’s achievements. He was only 23, but it was in that year that he made major discoveries in calculus, motion, optics, and gravitation. --for the kids who are listening, maybe you’ve learned about Isaac Newton in school when you learn the legend about how he was sitting under an apple tree and an apple fell on his head, and he had an a-ha moment and from there was able to discover the law of gravity.-- Robert’s point, that he made this morning, is that he had read something about how Isaac Newton was given the opportunity to work on these discoveries because of the closure of Cambridge University by an outbreak of the Bubonic Plague. Maybe if he was still as busy as usual... He would have never taken the time to sit under that apple tree...

I have wondered, and the Miracle Year point really just grew that wonder inside of me, if God is giving us an opportunity to grow in a way we otherwise would not be able to grow... to discover things we would not have otherwise discovered... to hear a word we wouldn’t have otherwise heard?

Can we, I'm wondering, make 2020 a Miracle Year? An Annus mirabilis?

I'm not suggesting that in this Miracle Year we would all make huge scientific discoveries, though maybe that's the case for some among us... I'm suggesting that you might enter a period of discernment about what God is planting inside of you during this time. Is there something you're being called to discover, whether it's a discovery within yourself or a discovery for the community, is there something God is planting inside of you during this time? And how and when will you harvest it?

- I. Our scripture this week is the Parable of the Wheat and the Weeds. This year, I am reading it as a parable of discernment.

So the parable says: *“The kingdom of heaven is like someone who planted good seed in his field. While people were sleeping, an enemy came and planted weeds among the wheat and went away.”*

A shallow reading of the scripture might make us think the parable of the weeds is describing an “us vs. them” situation, tempting us to name who in this world are the “wheat” and who are the “weeds.” “Us vs. Them” has been such an easy and damning trap during the Covid-19 pandemic, and for so long before. We have, frankly, failed to establish ourselves as humans against the virus, and instead established ourselves as liberal vs. conservative, old vs. young, rich vs. poor, race

against race, nation against nation. And I can tell you 100 times that the “Us vs. Them” mentality is not of God.

The more intentional look at this parable is to recognize that we each have our own field in our hearts. There is good wheat within our hearts and there are weeds within our hearts... and we don't always know the difference as they grow, but God calls us to do everything we can to walk towards the wholeness offered by wheat, and away from the emptiness offered by weeds.

Let me show you something-- here a picture of wheat next to tare, the specific weed Jesus is referring to here. The wheat and the weeds are not as apparent as dandelions in your well-manicured lawn. The two plants mentioned in scripture are two common kinds of grass. They are virtually indistinguishable from one another while they are growing.

If you go to our blog, you can also find our Breathing the Scripture Reflection that Karen Wagner puts together each week; she calls the one this week, “Breathing in Creative Tension” and after listing a number of difficult choices we face each day she writes, “We are a messy combination of wheat and weeds.” and I just know that is so true.

So in the parable, the servant says, “should we go gather up the weeds? Should we go get them out of there, remove them from the field?” and the landowner says, “no. Let them both grow side by side until it's time to harvest. At harvest time we will separate them.” Because the thing is, if we try to separate them now when they are still young, we might not pull the right ones.

The Landowner trusts that when the time is right, the harvesters will know what to keep and what to throw away. Just as God trusts us that if we continue to walk in the way of love, then when the time is right we will know the difference between the wheat and the weeds.

Karen also quotes John Lewis, may his memory be a blessing, who said, “Choose confrontation wisely, but when it is your time don't be afraid to stand up, speak up, and speak out against injustice. And if you follow your truth down the road to peace and the affirmation of love, if you shine like a beacon for all to see, then the poetry of all the great dreamers and philosophers is yours to manifest in a nation, a world community, and a Beloved Community that is finally at peace with itself.”

How do we know the difference? I offer the words of Bishop Michael Curry who says, “if it’s not about love, it’s not about God.” And I pair those words with those of John Lewis-- “if you follow your truth down the road to peace and the affirmation of love,” then you will know what beacon to follow, what beacon will lead to beloved community, you will know what is wheat and what is weeds. When the time is right, we’ll know what to do.

It is a parable about discernment. It offers the suggestion that instead of making up our minds about how we feel early on,

stubbornly position ourselves within that certainty... what if instead of that... we establish ourselves as people willing to watch, listen, wait with intentionality... allowing a different perspective to come into our fields, to plant a new thought, a new idea, and watch it grow. What if instead of immediately throwing away anything that doesn’t seem to fit, we allow it to grow while we examine it, take it into consideration, and consider what God might be planting in our lives.

And this is what we do next: when the ideas have grown, when the plants have grown, when it has all reached the time to be harvested, then we consider the words of John Lewis again: “follow your truth down the road to peace and the affirmation of love,” we consider the words of Bishop Curry: “If it’s not about love, it’s not about God.” and we’ll have no questions about what is wheat and what is weeds; what is nurturing and serving God’s people in the world and what is serving selfish interest.

Listen-- I know it is hard to watch and wait. We’re not patient people. We want the growth to happen now. We want the revolution to happen now. But the problem with cutting down the harvest too soon is that is that we might not have enough information to know if we’re keeping or knocking down the right thing. When that wheat and tare are little...it’s so hard to know.

So Jesus says, Let it grow. Watch it grow. And at the harvest we will know how to separate it.

Back to the Miracle Year now, huh?

Our children in the church are participating in Compassion Camp these past few weeks. It's an online Vacation Bible School and Rachel has been doing just a wonderful job organizing it. This week they have this prayer: it says, "Loving Spirit, You are active and alive always moving and stirring within and encouraging us!"

I am thinking of God's activity in that landowner's field. I'm considering the moving and stirring and encouraging that is happening between the wheat and the weeds... and I wonder about how our Active and Alive God is moving and stirring within and encouraging us today, pushing us into a Miracle Year... a time of processing and discerning and discovering God's work within us so that we can burst forth from this time as fuller, more intentional, miraculous versions of ourselves. I wonder about how both the wheat and the weeds are growing within us and calling us to discern what to keep and what to throw away.

Again, the hardest part about all of it is that the parable suggests we do not decide what that is going to look like right now. We aren't a patient society... and we want so badly to just go in and clean it all up right now. Get it out of here! I don't like that idea, I don't like that thought, I don't like that person... But Jesus says, "stop. Let it grow. Watch it grow. And at the harvest we will know how to separate it."

I truly believe that God is calling us towards something, as a human community, as a whole creation. I believe that God is calling us to stitch a garment that fits all of creation and this

earth, to allow a miracle year to bloom. Listen to the calling, and don't cut it down too fast.

I'll conclude with the rest of the prayer from Compassion Camp: Loving Spirit, You are active and alive, always moving and stirring within and around us. Please be an encouraging wind at our backs, giving us open minds and soft hearts to follow where you lead. Make us flexible and present in each moment, that we might embrace with compassion by letting go of what we expected.

Thanks be to God. Amen

Benediction

God's spirit is always with you. Wherever we go, God is there! If you ascend to heaven, God is there. If you settle at the farthest limits of the sea, God is there. In all places, God holds you fast. May you know deeply the presence of God: Creator, Christ and Holy Spirit. Go with God.

Postlude

Courante from Suite no. 1 in G Major by J.S.
Anna Bowman, cello