

**Lakewood Congregational Church**  
**Breathing in God and Country**

**July 5, 2020**

*16 'But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the market-places and calling to one another,*

*<sup>17</sup> "We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn."*

*<sup>18</sup>For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, "He has a demon"; <sup>19</sup>the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, "Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax-collectors and sinners!" Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.'*



*25 At that time Jesus said, 'I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; <sup>26</sup>yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. <sup>27</sup>All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.*

*28 'Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup>Take my yoke upon you and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup>For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.'* Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

♥ *Pro Deo et Patria* is a Latin phrase that means "For God and Country." It is the motto of the Army Chaplain Corps which includes Rev. Vance Awa, a LCC member. "In God We Trust" is on U.S. currency and "one nation, under God, indivisible with Liberty and Justice for all" closes our Pledge of Allegiance. The generations who built this country balanced faith and citizenship.

We need to discern how our faith influences our citizenship and how our citizenship influences our faith. This is messy, conflicting, I-want-you-to-hear-me and I-want-to-listen-to-you work that is difficult, even without social distancing. So, we will need to use all our heart, mind, soul, and strength as we listen to God and to each other. For God and Country is not an either/or proposition. The "and" indicates a creative process that needs all of us, as people of faith and as citizens.

First, we will ponder the God portion of that phrase. Paula Deal and I have the honor and joy of co-leading a small group studying Brian McLaren's book, *We Make This Road By Walking*. Our recent Zoom meeting included a chapter about embracing the Loving Spirit of God. That discussion provides the framework for today's Gospel passage. McLaren states that throughout the Bible we have key insights that show us how God wants to work with us. When God gave Adam life, God placed God's light, that spark, in every person. God wants to be in a relationship with us. Consider welcoming God into your life.

McLaren offers seven ways to be in love with God, which are very similar to having successful human relationships: show up, appreciate, cultivate honor and respect, ask for forgiveness, support God's dreams, open ourselves to God, and be vulnerable. Not every aspect of loving God is apparent in every scripture passage. I think today's lesson is a useful example.

**SHOW UP:** Jesus is speaking about himself and John the Baptist, saying: *We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn. (v. 17)* Like prophets in the past, John and Jesus were speaking about God clearly and passionately, while modeling a faithful life. And, the people were, largely, unwillingly to change their behavior. So, when it was time for shared grief over loss of faithfulness and loss of eternal life, John and Jesus were looking at each other and a very small group of followers.

Even with social distancing, we expect people to be present in our lives, whether at work, in a family, at church, or as a community. Being present takes many forms these days. God expects us to be present and to show up, as well.

- How do you show up to God?
- How does God show up to you?

**APPRECIATE:** *I, thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth (v. 25).* No one likes to be taken for granted. Do we thank God every day and throughout the day for our lives, our family, the weather, and all our gifts? Practice gratitude.

- Are you willing to practice gratitude daily?
- If so, how do you intend to do this?

**CULTIVATE HONOR AND RESPECT:** Jesus said, *All things have been handed over to me by the Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father (v. 27).* Jesus did not take credit for his own gifts. Honoring who God is in your relationship is more than gratitude. It is an awareness accompanied by humility that we belong, first, to God, the source of our life and the giver of our blessings. We also honor and respect God through worship, prayer, and praise.

- How do you honor and respect God?
- How does God honor and respect you?

**ASK FOR FORGIVENESS:** I am not noticing a direct link between this passage and asking for forgiveness. I am confident, however, that if the people who ignored John and Jesus were to ask for forgiveness, then God would grant forgiveness. God would also welcome them into the beloved community.

- This week acknowledge an apology that you have needed to give and offer it.
- Ask God's forgiveness for any areas in your life that serve as a wedge between both of you.

**SUPPORT GOD’S DREAMS:** In this passage, we have the opposite of God’s dreams as an example: *‘But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the market-places and calling to one another (v. 16).* We know “thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” is God’s dream. Jesus told us this and we have heard God asking variations on this request since Adam and Eve.

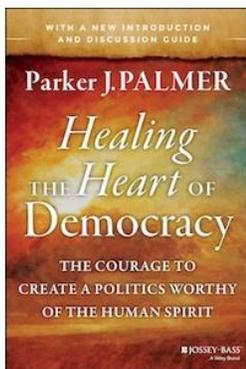
- How do you describe or illustrate God’s dreams for us?
- Which aspect of God’s dreams are you willing to support?

**OPENING OURSELVES:** We open ourselves so God can support and encourage us. This happens when we ask for help, guidance, discernment and support. And we will hear, *“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.”* (v. 28)

- What is stopping you from asking God to carry your burdens?
- What role does God have on your team for your next adventure?

**BE VULNERABLE:** We are not alone, in joy or in sorrow. *Take my yoke upon you and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.* (v. 29) With God, you can be honest. You can disagree or be angry. You can question God. Vulnerability and trust are companions. You can be vulnerable with God because you can trust God.

- What would you like to learn from God? Please ask.
- What would your life be like if you had rest for your soul?



♥ Last week was our introduction to Parker J. Palmer’s book, *Healing the Heart of Democracy*. We also had an opportunity to review two videos and listen to Carrie Newcomer’s song, “If not now, tell me when.”

Today, we are looking at more foundational information, as well as the first habit of the heart, *We’re All In This Together*. Please consider purchasing this book or borrowing it from the library.

Before you begin the videos, I would like to quote Palmer on what he means by “heart.”

“In this book, the word heart reclaims its original meaning. ‘Heart’ comes from the Latin *cor* and points not merely to our emotions but to the core of the self, that center place where all of our ways of knowing converge --- intellectual, emotional, sensory, intuitive, imaginative, experiential, relationship, and bodily, among others. The heart is where we integrate what we know in our minds with what we know in our bones, the place where our knowledge can become more fully human. *Cor* is also the Latin root from which we get the word *courage*. When all that we understand of self and world comes together in the center place call the heart, we are more likely to find the courage to act humanely on what we know.” (pg. 6)

## Videos

The Politics of the Broken-hearted (3:25 min):

<http://www.couragerenewal.org/democracyguide/v4/>

- What are your primary concerns about how our democracy is functioning?
- Do you think it is possible for people who disagree with each other politically to come together around shared concerns for democracy itself?

Democracy, the Endless Experiment (3:00 min):

<http://www.couragerenewal.org/democracyguide/v7/>

- Do you agree with Palmer that democracy is always a risk?
- Where do you think the risk lies for “blowing up the lab?”

Citizenship Lite is Not Enough(3:30 min):

<http://www.couragerenewal.org/democracyguide/v11/>

- How is Palmer’s story as a citizen like and unlike your own?
- How might you engage in a more active form of citizenship?

1<sup>st</sup> Habit of the Heart (1:25): <http://www.couragerenewal.org/democracyguide/v13/>

- What are some ways you live – or would like to live – in recognition of our interconnectedness?
- What are some of the obstacles to living interconnectedly?

Song by Carrie Newcomer, *Room at the Table*,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=92OM5bdQ4N4>

♥ Prayer Wall: I am sharing an idea that I am using this summer and that I have used on other occasions when my thoughts need more space. The Palmer book has seemingly simple questions, but I am struggling with complicated responses and questions leading to more questions. What is freedom? What have I accepted unquestioningly about citizenship? How are my faith and role in this country connected? How could my broken-heartedness be a bridge for others? How do I live the belief that we’re all in this together?



I have not painted a dry-erase wall, so I use long pieces of paper and create a prayer wall. I add thoughts on sticky notes or I write on the paper. I can add images or song lyrics or anything else that fits the moment. It is not attractive, but it is functional and helpful. I stand in front of it and prayers and ideas emerge. Even with all the questions, I feel hopeful and even more committed to balancing faith and my role as a citizen in this diverse, complex experiment that we call democracy.



Listen to this performance of Aaron Copeland's "Fanfare for the Common Man," and "Lincoln Portrait," both composed in 1942 shortly following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. In 2002, this was the pre-game performance by the Boston Pops Orchestra for Super Bowl XXXVI, following the attacks on 9/11/2001. The narrators are Presidents Gerald Ford, Jimmy Carter, George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and First Lady, Nancy Reagan.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8P-Ep-GsTVg>

- The "Fanfare" is considered an American anthem. Why do you think this music speak so deeply to people from all walks of life?
- What do Lincoln words mean to you today?

### References and Images:

**Creation of Adam** (1512) by Michelangelo, Sistine Chapel: [https://1.bp.blogspot.com/-iKx3jc6Bcrs/WfkN4WPuuJI/AAAAAAAAAGu4/4\\_YFtug2zHIqxY9jGJsfVBnV7m235aGeQLcBGAs/w1200-h630-p-k-no-nu/Michelangelo%252C\\_Creation\\_of\\_Adam\\_01.jpg](https://1.bp.blogspot.com/-iKx3jc6Bcrs/WfkN4WPuuJI/AAAAAAAAAGu4/4_YFtug2zHIqxY9jGJsfVBnV7m235aGeQLcBGAs/w1200-h630-p-k-no-nu/Michelangelo%252C_Creation_of_Adam_01.jpg)

**Parker J. Palmer:** [www.courageandrenewal.org](http://www.courageandrenewal.org)

**Hands in prayer circle:** <https://image.shutterstock.com/image-photo/group-diverse-hands-circle-260nw-1110664052.jpg>

### Lincoln:

[https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&url=https%3A%2F%2Fen.wikipedia.org%2Fwiki%2FAbraham\\_Lincoln&psig=AOvVaw3kXDdQt1qgiU7IBtw2GTmm&ust=1593821358576000&source=images&cd=vfe&v](https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&url=https%3A%2F%2Fen.wikipedia.org%2Fwiki%2FAbraham_Lincoln&psig=AOvVaw3kXDdQt1qgiU7IBtw2GTmm&ust=1593821358576000&source=images&cd=vfe&v)