

Lakewood Congregational Church

A Congregation of the United Church of Christ

Sunday, August 30, 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.

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

Prelude

“Hear My Prayer, O God” (Biblical Song no. 6, adapted from Psalms 61 and 63)

by Antonin Dvorak

Naomi Columna, soprano; Ben Malkevitch, piano
(a remote collaboration)

Call to Worship

Join me in our spoken call to worship.

One: We who dwell in the shelter of the Most High

All: **Seek God here.**

One: We who come to be inspired and changed

All: **Seek God’s Spirit here.**

One: We who know how little we know

All: **Seek God’s Word here.**

Invocation

God, you are made known to us in the rustling wind that blows, in the blazing fire that does not consume, in the face of the good, in the deep of the unknown. We meet you here. We accept your greeting. We welcome your inspiration. We await the change you have in store for us. Draw us in to you. Inhabit our spirits. Focus our attention. Bring us to you - you who are already with us. Help us to be as you would have us be. Through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, here and everywhere, now and always. Amen.

Hymn *I Have Decided to Follow Jesus*

Ben Malkevitch, baritone and organ

Unison

1. I have de - cid - ed to fol - low Je - sus, I have de -
 2. The world be - hind me, the cross be - fore me, the world be -
 3. Though none go with me, I still will fol - low, though none go
 4. Will you de - cide now to fol - low Je - sus? Will you de -

cid - ed to fol - low Je - sus, I have de - cid - ed to fol - low
 hind me, the cross be - fore me, the world be - hind me, the cross be -
 with me, I still will fol - low, though none go with me, I still will
 cide now to fol - low Je - sus? Will you de - cide now to fol - low

Je - sus— no turn - ing back, no turn - ing back.
 fore me— no turn - ing back, no turn - ing back.
 fol - low— no turn - ing back, no turn - ing back.
 Je - sus?— No turn - ing back, no turn - ing back.

Special Message from Global Ministries

Rev. LaMarco Cable, *Executive, Global Ministries Africa Office*

Joanna: It's been a while since we provided an update on our efforts with the United Church of Christ in Mozambique, but we have so much to celebrate. In the past two years, because of the passion of several people in the church, most notably David and Laura Sangree, LCC has really stepped up to grow our commitment to Global Ministries. Through fundraising efforts, LCC has provided over \$8000 per year to the UCC in Mozambique for two years in a row. David and I asked Rev. LaMarco Cable, who came to speak at our church last fall, to provide a video update on the work of the Africa Office of Global Ministries. The Outreach Team is prayerfully preparing to create a new opportunity to contribute to this ongoing work, and you will hear more about that in the near future. For now, here is Rev. Cable's 5-minute update:



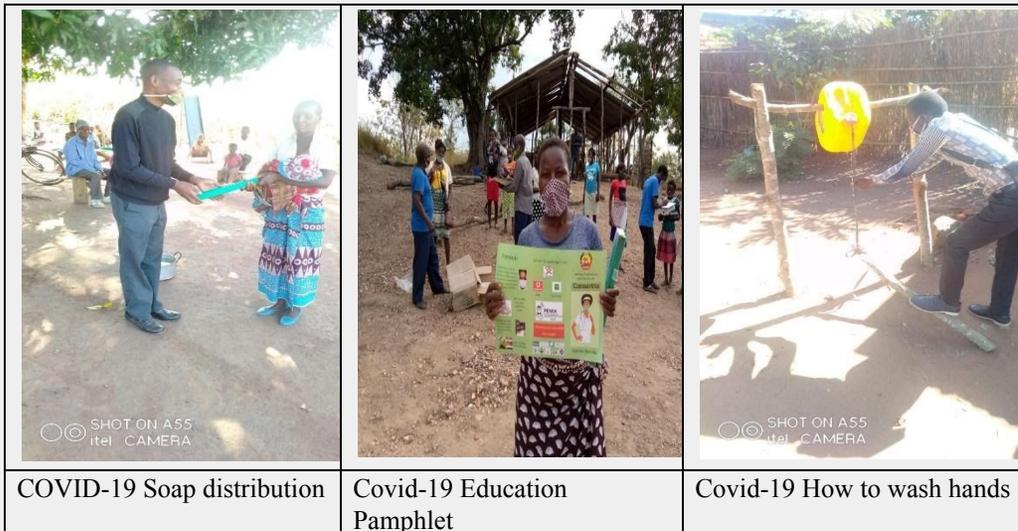
Pastoral Prayer

We have so much to pray for.

Almighty God,
 Guide us by your Holy Spirit,
 that our prayers may serve your will
 and show your steadfast love.
 We pray for the world you have made,
 that evil powers would be overthrown and that wrongs would be
 righted, that those who hunger and thirst for justice would be
 fed and satisfied, so that all your children may freely enjoy your
 creation.

We pray, too, for your creation, which you call “good”; protect
 those in the paths of wildfires, as well as those, in this season,
 threatened by hurricanes and tropical storms;

O God, whom we cannot love unless we love our neighbors,



remove from our hearts the disdain for your children with whom we disagree; grow understanding among us as neighbors and strangers, across races and genders and classes and ethnicities—that we may have a true experience of one another’s humanity in all its glory and all its wreckage.

And, mighty God, more powerful than any nation, direct those who make, enforce, and judge our laws, all our elected and appointed officials, our governor and our mayors, our school boards and our neighborhood councils; may our leaders be guided by your wisdom, and may they lead in a way of righteousness, that equity and honesty and integrity would be lifted up in our common life.

Merciful God,
Look with compassion on those who are sick;
Lend your depth of insight and wisdom
to doctors and researchers working hard on a coronavirus vaccine, that the virus will surrender.
And stand today with those who have lost someone dear to them—
to age, or illness, or violence; remind the grieving that neither death nor life,
nor things present nor things to come,
nor height, nor depth
nor anything else in all creation
can separate us from your love;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
in whose name we pray,
praying as he taught his disciples:

Our Father . . .

Invitation to the Offering

In times of plenty and want, God provides for our deepest needs. Give generously out of the abundance of God’s blessing so that in these challenging times God’s work might continue.

Dedication Prayer

In your Creation, O God, we stand on the holiest of ground. May these gifts be a blessing to all that you have made. May the church, organizations and people that receive them act as your hands. May needs be seen and met, and may the giving fit the need. Through Christ, who models infinite giving. Amen.

Scripture Reading, read by Melissa Parlanti-Klein

Matthew 16:21-28

From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, ‘God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you.’ But he turned and said to Peter, ‘Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling-block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.’

Then Jesus told his disciples, ‘If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?’

‘For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.’

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.

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. I love the prologue and title story of the memoir, *Walking with the Wind* by John Lewis and Michael D’Orso. John Lewis (may his memory be a blessing) kicks off the memoir with this short recollection of his childhood. He writes about a day when he was playing outside with many of his friends when a storm started approaching and they were gathered into the house. I’m just going to read you the piece of writing, so this is from *Walking with the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement*, published in 1998, or you can also find it in a really wonderful compilation of essays called “The Impossible Will Take a While: A Citizen’s Guide to Hope in a Time of Fear”

- II. “Aunt Seneva was the only adult around, and as the sky blackened and the wind grew stronger, she herded us all inside.

Her house was not the biggest place around, and it seemed even smaller with so many children squeezed inside. Small and surprisingly quiet. All of the shouting and laughter that had been going on earlier, outside, had stopped. The wind was howling now, and the house was starting to shake. We were scared. Even Aunt Seneva was scared.

And then it got worse. Now the house was beginning to sway. The wood plank flooring beneath us began to bend. And then, a corner of the room started lifting up.

I couldn’t believe what I was seeing. None of us could. This storm was actually pulling the house toward the sky. With us inside it.

That was when Aunt Seneva told us to clasp hands. Line up and hold hands, she said, and we did as we were told. Then she had us walk as a group toward the corner of the room that was rising. From the kitchen to the front of the house we walked, the wind screaming outside, sheets of rain beating on the tin roof. Then we walked back in the other direction, as another end of the house began to lift.

And so it went, back and forth, fifteen children walking with the wind, holding that trembling house down with the weight of our small bodies.”

John Lewis continues, “More than half a century has passed since that day, and it has struck me more than once over those many years that our society is not unlike the children in that house, rocked again and again by the winds of one storm or another, the walls around us seeming at times as if they might fly apart.

It seemed that way in the 1960s, at the height of the civil rights movement, when America itself felt as if it might burst at the seams—so much tension, so many storms. But the people of conscience never left the house. They never ran away. They stayed, they came together and they did the best they could, clasping hands and moving toward the corner of the house that was the weakest.

And then another corner would lift, and we would go there. And eventually, inevitably, the storm would settle, and the house would still stand.

But we knew another storm would come, and we would have to do it all over again.

And we did.

And we still do, all of us. You and I.

Children holding hands, walking with the wind. . . .”

III. This was written in 1998, but it’s just as true 22 years later: “so much tension, so many storms.” Our news cycles are a messy, tangled glob of tension and storms, and we’re all feeling quite exhausted by it all. And of

course not only the news cycles, but our own lives feel like this so often as well-- perhaps you feel, like I do, that the bad news about people we love is hitting one after another, and the tensions in our families and in our neighborhoods are high and disorienting.

- A. If left unchecked, the news of our days would pull us down into despair. The bad news-- the tension, the storm-- would sweep our house right off the ground and off into the devastation.
- B. And so the Good News is that as followers of Jesus Christ we are not people left unchecked. When my mind would sink into despair, I am reminded that we are followers of a Risen Christ, followers of a promise that in the end there will always be a blessing. I’m finding myself focused on this moment in the Gospel when Peter would sink into despair, but Jesus checks him: “You are not setting your mind on divine things, but on human things.”
- C. I also remember, actually, the wise words of Fred Rogers, who said, “When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, ‘Look for the helpers.’ You will always find people who are helping... I am always comforted by realizing that there are still so many helpers-- so many caring people in this world.”

IV. When we set our minds on devastation and on despair, we are setting our minds on earthly things. We get stuck in this mentality that the storm and the tension is our whole picture, incapable of redemption. When we set our minds on hope, we are setting our minds on the Divine, on the promise of covenant, on God’s commitment to never let us fly off into the storm. When we set our minds on hope,

we remember that whatever despair we have in our lives does not have the capacity to overcome us.

- V. John Lewis's story and Mr. Rogers' quote both remind us specifically that often the hope comes in our commitment to relationship, connection, and human community. When we don't know the next step to take, it seems quite clear to turn to our friends and neighbors, our helpers, our connection to the Divine. When we remain connected to one another, we are able to keep the balance of what is needed to do God's work in a tumultuous world-- to hold down the house in just the right places, to focus in on the work of so many caring people in the world.

- A. I can speak for our church in saying that we have so many connections across this community and across the world. You just heard from Rev. Cable from Global Ministries who reminded us of our connection to the United Church of Christ in Mozambique. Last week, you had the opportunity to watch the worship service from the Living Water Association to remember that we are not just one church but many churches woven throughout, Northeast Ohio, and then further through the Conference, all of Ohio and Northern Kentucky, and further through the United Church of Christ, our connection to the whole country and through Global Ministries, the world. Each week I communicate with other pastors here in Lakewood and in Rocky River and West Park, and through Greater Cleveland Congregations, to know that we are not weathering this storm on our own. Together we are working to occupy the overlap between heaven and earth, to hold tight to the

promise of resurrection, and that hope is stronger than fear. We have to do whatever we can do in our personal lives or in our careers or whatever your network looks like to build up these connections so that we can hold one another up in mutual hope, so that we can see the vitality of the future.

- 1. Ask yourself, as the storm feels like it's picking up your house from the foundation, who do you have with you to walk to one end and then to the other hand-in-hand, to hold that house down?

- VI. Relationships are complicated, of course. Right?

- A. I love this-- in this scripture passage Jesus turns and calls Peter, Satan-- a stumbling block. It was actually last week, when I didn't preach on the text because of the Association service, but it was just last week when Jesus called Peter the rock on which I will build my church. Jesus just went in a matter of paragraphs, from calling Peter the rock on which he will build his church, to Satan, a stumbling block. So we know relationships are complicated, and we know that we struggle sometimes to understand our role within our community.

- B. In times like this, when the world floods, or when fire overcomes it, or when a pandemic spreads, or whatever battles you might be facing in your life, that somehow we're stripped down to a basic simplicity in our complex and intricate relationships: we belong to each other. We cannot do it alone. God created us as human beings, as a

living and breathing planet in a living and breathing creation. And to remain intimately connected is a Divine promise. That God created us to belong to each other is a Divine promise. And so when you begin to sink into despair and isolation, ask yourself, “Am I setting my mind on Divine things or on earthly things?” Ask yourself, at the end of the day, when everything material and all earthly concerns are stripped away, where are the helpers? Where are the connections? Who do you belong to? We belong to God, and we belong to each other. Keep your mind set on that, beloved. Thanks be to God.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Benediction

Go forth from this place, even if you stay right where you are, doing the work of Christ in the world:

extend support to those in need,

speak up for those cast aside,

build bridges of reconciliation,

strengthen bonds of community,

knowing that you remain in the abiding presence of the

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, One God, Mother of us all. Amen.

Postlude

Dear Lord

by John Coltrane

David Kasper, alto saxophone; Ben Malkevitch, piano