

# Lakewood Congregational Church

*A Congregation of the United Church of Christ*

Sunday, September 13, 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. Welcome to our  
Virtch service today!

I want to begin by saying this: At Lakewood Congregational Church, we strive to be people of extravagant welcome. Whether you are young or old, gay or straight, single or partnered, happy or sad, confused or inspired, street smart or college-educated, whether you can't pay your bills or you have more than enough to share—no matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here in this place, to worship the 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](http://www.lcc-church.org)
- Call the church office at (216) 221-9555 to discuss other options

## **Prelude**

*For the Beauty of the Earth* by John Rutter

LCC Virtual Choir

Naomi Columna and Tori Peacock, sopranos; Gwen Delaney, alto  
Michael Komperda and Ben Liu, tenors; Tim Hampton and Noah Hamrick, basses; Ben Malkevitch, piano

## **Call to Worship**

***Join me in our spoken call to worship.***

One: God, whom we gather to worship,

**All: has blessed us through our wonderful Faith Formation volunteers and contributors to our Faith Formation activities;**

One: has comforted us through tender ministries of phone calls, emails, letters, and porch visits;

**All: has challenged us through our service opportunities like our Community Meal and this weekend's youth mission experience;**

One: has inspired us through choir participation and the creativity of musicians;

**All: has led us through insightful church leadership— staff and volunteer leadership alike.**

One: Come, let us worship God, in thanks and praise.

## **Invocation**

It is a joy that we are able to create Sacred Space and Sacred Time together today, O God; to feel the connection of our church family and to prayerfully wonder what possibilities are in store for us. Sometimes the flexibility of summer and the chaos of uncharted territory has caused us to fall out of the routine of making space for church. So on Rally Sunday we ask that you draw us back in: Draw us back to you, draw us back to our church, and draw us back to the person you are calling us to be. Calm the chaos in our lives. Encourage us to set goals, to find structure and to center our lives on you. And may our year be filled with unexpected grace. Amen.

**Hymn**     *Be Thou My Vision*     LCC     Virtual     Choir



1. Be thou my vi - sion, O Lord of my heart;  
2. Be thou my wis - dom, and thou my true word;  
3. Rich - es I heed not, nor vain, emp - ty praise,  
4. Great God of heav - en, my vic - to - ry won,



naught be all else to me, save that thou art  
I ev - er with thee and thou with me, Lord;  
thou mine in - her - i - tance, now and al - ways:  
may I reach heav - en's joys, O bright heaven's Sun!



thou my best thought by day or by night,  
thou my re - deem - er, my love thou hast won,  
thou and thou on - ly, first in my heart,  
Heart of my own heart, what - ev - er be - fall,



wak - ing or sleep - ing, thy pres - ence my light.  
thou in me dwell - ing, and I with thee one.  
Great God of heav - en, my trea - sure thou art.  
still be my vi - sion, O Ru - ler of all.

**Pastoral Prayer**

Eternal Presence, Lover of our souls, open our hearts again, so that our trust in you is increased. Heal our hearts, so that gratitude and joy overflow. Soften our hearts to the truth of your love—for us, for this world, for all people.

The news of our world comes at us so fast, with such worry. We go through each day with our shields held high, trying to deflect what we hear, to avoid being wounded. Yet there are so many who are literally wounded that we cannot simply turn away—fleeing war, poverty, hunger, oppression, and injustice of all kinds. How long, O God, before we recognize the humanity in one another, before we act with full compassion for all of your people, before we create shalom for all of the world?

We pray that you would give leaders of all nations compassion and wisdom so that shelter and safety and joy for all people can be the reality.

We pray for our law makers, that you would move them beyond partisan differences to work collectively to overcome the pandemic we are living in. We pray that the promise will come true that the sword will be turned into plowshare.

We give you thanks for the resilience you have given to humanity—the ability to work for a single cause despite resistance of all sorts, the strength to rebuild after the devastation, the ability to heal after the loss of a loved one, the determination to get through an illness or surgery, the ever-present love of parents in the task of raising children, the resilience and resourcefulness of the disabled, the stoic and wise strength of the elderly. Despite all of the wounds we carry, we thank you for the ongoing strength and grace you give to us.

We give you thanks for one another, those we know and those we don't, and for this community of faith and its history filled with both joys and sorrows. We thank you for people who have worshiped in these pews for generations, and we pray for the day when we return to them. And we thank you for the gift of Jesus, who came into this world to convince us that you truly

are here, in each of our Sacred Spaces with us, uniting us, because you love us. We pray all of this with the prayer that Jesus taught to his disciples, saying together,

**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.**

### **Scripture Reading, read by Charlotte Petrie**

Matthew 4:23-5:12

#### Jesus Ministers to Crowds of People

Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people. So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those who were afflicted with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics, and he cured them. And great crowds followed him from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.

#### The Beatitudes

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

‘Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

‘Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. ‘Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

‘Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

‘Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

‘Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

‘Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

‘Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

‘Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

### **Message**

\*\*\*We’ve included this transcript 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.

\*\*\*today’s transcript is not quite as specific as previous transcripts. It is more improvised than.\*\*\*

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.

Today is what we call Rally Sunday, which is a tradition we’ve had at LCC for many, many years. Typically, it is the Sunday when Faith Formation and Choir return to our Sunday morning activities. Throughout the summer, every Summer, we continue to have beautiful and diverse music for worship, but typically

not as a large group. This summer, we've done the same for our virtual services. Now, you'll see us return to "group" singing, but it is of course in a unique way. The group singing through hymns and choir anthems you will hear in the services this Fall is remotely recorded by members of our choir, and put together by our Director of Music Ministries, Ben Malkevitch, using computer software. If you're interested in participating in these collaborations, make sure to let Ben know!

Faith Formation has continued throughout the summer, through our remote Compassion Camp Vacation Bible School and other weekly Faith Formation Videos. But this week we are excited to start up a series on the Beatitudes which will be consistent both in our church services and our Faith Formation videos. We particularly like the way this connection will promote conversation among family members, and help us learn to build our spiritual lives at home. There is too much information about Faith Formation for me to share here, but I encourage you to watch Rachel's videos and keep up with church correspondences to learn more about how to be involved. I also want to particularly encourage those of you with children or grandchildren in your home to take this time to build your spiritual lives together as a family. Pray together, discuss the services together, and identify "God Moments" when you see them throughout your day.

Finally while we usually have Coffee Hour all summer long, Rally Day this year marks a return, in a sense, to Coffee Hour. Since we can't gather in our own parlor, we are beginning Zoom Coffee Hour on the 2nd and 4th Sunday of the month, and Zoom Prayer Hour on the 1st and 3rd Sunday of the month. I want to really encourage you to give these opportunities a try. It is a way for us to remain connected, and we feel pretty excited

about some of the conversation facilitating strategies we've been working on so that everyone is not talking over each other all the time!

Because it's Rally Sunday, today's service looks a little bit different. First of all, I'm spending a long time right at the top of the service today explaining things, which means that my sermon will be a little shorter. But I think these explanations are important to frame us as we enter into this fall. Second, you see that I'm wearing my clergy robe. This is the first time I've worn my clergy robe for Vitch since this all began. For no particular reason, I just haven't. But today I decided it felt right, and I want to tell you why.

I want to really encourage you to see the ways in which these services are not the same as simply watching TV. We are a very laid back church in many ways. You all know that you can come as you are, dressed how you're comfortable, as your full and authentic selves. But even so, when you come to worship in this Sanctuary, you are in a Sacred Space, in a Sacred Moment, standing on Holy Ground to worship God and learn to walk in the way of Jesus, surrounded by the presence of the Holy Spirit. Sacred means "set apart." It's different from what you do in other moments throughout your day. So I felt like maybe if I wore my robe and stole, which is an outward sign of the Covenant I made through Ordination into Christian Ministry, you might see it as a reminder of the Covenant you have made to God and to the Body of Christ. Perhaps it will encourage you to take an extra step to make this time Sacred. For each of you, I understand that will look differently. Some of you might find meaning in getting dressed nicely, or lighting a candle, or doing a breathing meditation before beginning the service. Some of you might find meaning in calling a friend from church to reflect

on the service together. I can't say what will be right for you, but I just want to encourage you to find a way to make your space a Sacred Space, and make this time a Sacred Time: it's different from watching Netflix, or a TED Talk.

Speaking of Covenants, Rally Day seems like a good time to remind you that churches are Covenantal bodies. That means that we are committed to one another-- a two-way street that we care for others and others care for us. We are committed to caring for each other in mutual love, support, and care, and holding one another accountable as Disciples of Christ. I have been so honored, blessed, and proud to see the ways in which this congregation has lived into its covenant with one another during this time. As we head into the fall and continue to journey through a drastically different way of living and being in the world, I want to encourage you to take time each week to do at least two things to build upon that covenant. The first thing is simple: attend Virtch. Commit to regularly watching, listening, or reading the transcript. I know it's not the same as being here in person. Trust me, I stand here and talk to the back of a phone every week. But I really want to encourage you to commit to this time. Because if you give up, get out of the habit, or close your mind to the possibility of this time being Sacred, you will miss the way that God's grace comes in to fill the gap, and it is just too beautiful to miss.

I said take each week to do two things to build on your covenant with the church. The first is to commit to regularly attending Virtch. The second is to connect with at least one other member of this Body of Christ every week. You can think about what is the right way for you to do that-- a phone call, a postcard, an in-person visit that is within your comfort level. You can choose to connect with someone you don't know well, or someone you do. You can choose to connect with the same person every

week, or a different person each week. Come to Zoom Coffee Hour and see if there's someone you want to get to know better, and then reach out to that person. Share stories about where you see God at work in your lives right now. Now, I realize that not everyone who is watching our online services is a member of LCC, but all of this still applies. You're welcome to participate in whatever way you're able to, or you might take this challenge and apply it to a different community in your life. I also realize that some of you are perfectly happy to stay fairly disconnected, and just chime in from time to time. If that's you, that's okay too, but I would still encourage you to find someone who might be a partner in your spiritual journey.

Overall, the point I want to convey about church on this Rally Sunday is a point I made in my Rally Day letter to the church. I shared about my Life Anthem, a joyful, poppy dance song called "Church" by Samm Henshaw. The chorus is, on repeat, "Wake up and get yourself to church." I wrote, "This song was a favorite right away. I was the kid who thought a pew felt like home, the college student who still set my alarm on Sunday morning no matter what Saturday night entailed, and I'm still the one who researches churches to attend on vacation.

Needless to say, I certainly never imagined we'd go this long without waking up and getting ourselves to the physical church building.

And yet somehow the joy of the song hasn't changed for me. "Wake up and get yourselves to church" is more than a literal invitation; it's a way of navigating the world. When you wake up, where do you go? When you're afraid, to whom do you turn? When you're lonely, who do you call? When you're unsure of the road ahead, what advice do you seek? In other words, do you

wake up and get yourself into resentment and fear? Or do you wake up and get yourself to church: to the Gospel, to the Resurrection, to the Body of Christ, who always has your back when you're down?

I am filled with hope that God continues to call us to Be the Church. We have an opportunity to walk a unique leg of our spiritual journey with Grace and authenticity, and an ever-strengthened bond between us, knowing that nothing can separate us from the love of God through Jesus Christ; nothing can separate us from church, even when we have to be physically apart.

So last year, the driving scripture we used for Faith Formation and other communications throughout the year was "Perfect Love Casts out Fear from 1 John 4:18. This year, we have chosen, "Nothing can separate us from the love of God" from Romans 8:38-39. As Rachel pointed out in her Rally Day letter, "Nothing can separate us from the love of God, not even a pandemic."

Last year I also said these words on Rally Day and I want to say them again; I've adapted them a bit to catch up with the times:

I pray every day that this Church-- Lakewood Congregational Church, the United Church of Christ is a home-- a place where God's children gather and know that they are worthy of love and belonging, made in the Image of God, and that they are Fearfully and Wonderfully made.

And listen... I know it isn't perfect. No church is perfect. No human community is perfect. There are times in this place when feelings get hurt, when needs aren't met, when voices aren't

heard, and in those times we ask for God's grace to enter in and recharge, rebuild, and restore us to our Covenant and our connection.

But we are people of hope, who are called to put our energy towards the world we want and the people we strive to be. So when we live in that place, in that mindset, in that understanding that we are both receivers and givers of Love because of our Covenant with God, there is nothing that separates us-- not fear, anxiety, embarrassment, anger, resentment, greed, hatred, dwelling in the past, or a global pandemic that prevents us from loving our neighbor. There's just not room for anything that wants to separate us from God's love, because that love is strong enough to draw us back together, stronger, and more resilient.

Finally, I'm going to talk about the Beatitudes. How long ago was it that Charlotte read that text? I'm actually using it this week, as a week to plant the seed... because we're going to hear it again next week too. And after that, we're going to begin to break it down and speak more specifically about each of Jesus' Beatitudes and the ways they speak to us as Disciples in 2020.

This week, I hope you heard the scripture and are allowing it to wash over you, and we will continue to talk about it for the next 11 weeks.

God enters into our broken moments and calls us blessed.

Open your hearts, minds, and spirits to creating a sacred space to let God's grace enter in. Amen.

## **God Moment, by Charlotte Petrie**

In The Columns this month, we briefly introduced a new idea for church called "God Moments. This is just a simple way to bring more voices and familiar faces into our Virtual Church services. Take 3-5 minutes to tell us about a way you saw God working in your life recently. Be creative! Show us a beloved pet, a family heirloom, or tell us a joke that reminded you of God's gift of laughter. Take us on a walk to your favorite spot in the park, or show us your home office setup. You can record yourself on your own device or contact the church office to set up a time to record. You are welcome to sign up to be a liturgist and share your God Moment in the same week.

## **Benediction**

Beloved, open your hearts and your minds and your spirits to see the ways in which God is entering into this time to bring you further along in your faith and spiritual journey.

## **Postlude**

*Andante from Voluntary no. 1* by John Stanley  
Mike Galloway, trumpet; Ben Malkevitch, organ