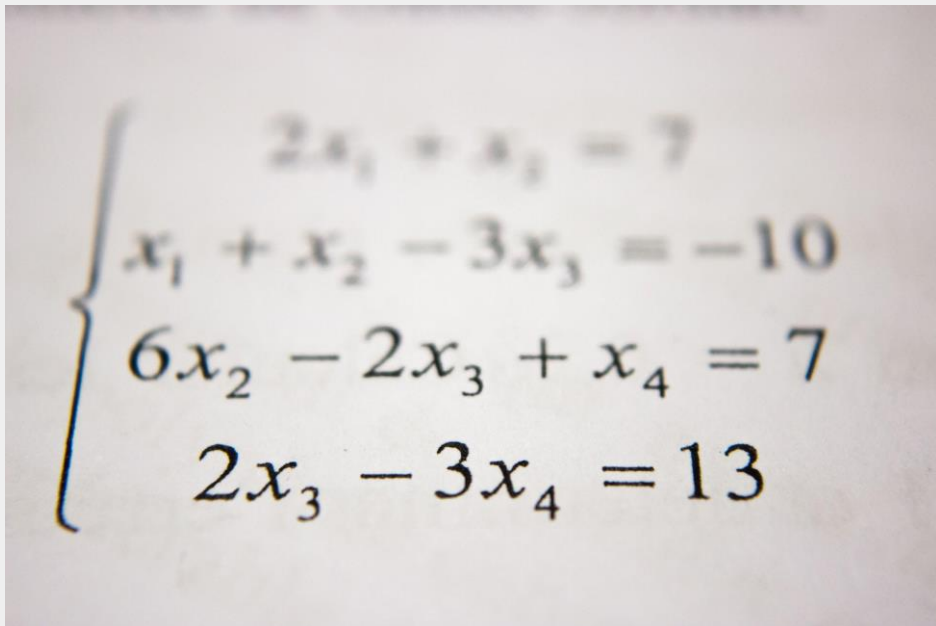


Lakewood Congregational Church

A Congregation of the United Church of Christ

Sunday, September 20, 2020

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


$$\left\{ \begin{array}{l} 2x_1 + x_2 = 7 \\ x_1 + x_2 - 3x_3 = -10 \\ 6x_2 - 2x_3 + x_4 = 7 \\ 2x_3 - 3x_4 = 13 \end{array} \right.$$

Welcome and Announcements

Welcome to worship on this Sunday.

We are glad you're worshipping with us today. Welcome to our Virtch service today!

Today's service looks a little different because of the Blessings at Beck event at the Beck Center from 11-12 today. Hope you'll join us there!

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
- Call the church office at (216) 221-9555 to discuss other options

Prelude

The Beatitudes by John William Gordon
Ben Malkevitch, baritone and piano

Pastoral Prayer

Precious Jesus, Lord, Savior, Teacher,
hear us as we pray,
and as we plead,

Jesus, you said "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

We pray for those who live in poverty
who go without the necessities of life,
like food, shelter, safety, hope.
Grant them the kingdom they should have,
through our efforts to give and serve.

Jesus, you said "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted."

We pray for the grieving,
those who have lost loved ones,
or dreams, or plans for the future.

Hold them gently, we pray,
speak comfort to them,
to us,
and through us.

Jesus, you said, "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

We pray for the powerless,
for those who go unseen and unheard,
for those trapped in systems of oppression and violence,
which they cannot escape.
Fill them with your promise of liberation,
and strength in a new world.

Jesus, you said "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

We pray for those who work for your kingdom,
for clergy, counselors, activists, artists,
politicians, teachers, parents, mentors.

We pray for those who sacrifice comfort and popularity,
in order to follow your call.

Fill them with your power and peace,
and guide us in their example.

Jesus, you said, "Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

We pray for those with power,
who can choose mercy or silence or revenge.

Guide leaders in every place,
into the way of your servant love,
which submitted itself to death,
rather than gain vengeance.

Jesus, you said "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

We pray for the pure in heart today,

for those gifted with joyful and loving spirits,
for those who easily see the face of God in their neighbors.
Protect and nurture them,
and help us to learn from their example.

Jesus, you said, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

We pray for all who seek to bring peace to this fractured world,
bridge-builders and mediators,
those who seek reconciliation
rather than shows of force.
Multiply them, until the whole world knows,
what it is like to live without fear.

Jesus, you said, “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

We pray for those who are shamed, slandered,
imprisoned or executed,
for following your will and heeding your call.
We pray for those around the world
who do not worship in safety
and those who try to do what’s right
despite the odds.
Teach us to prefer righteousness to comfort,
that we might see a world renewed.

Jesus, you said we are the salt of the earth and the light of the world,
precious, elemental, fragile, crucial.
Teach us to be your light in the world,
driving out the shadows of despair and hurt,
and lighting the way to your loving arms.

Jesus, you taught us how to pray,
and listened to everyone who came to you,

with whatever pain or joy they had to share.
We lift to you now the concerns of the day...
For these and all other concerns of our hearts, we say
Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.
And now we pray as Jesus taught us, saying,

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.

Invitation to the Offering

God gives to us continually. In each breath, we receive God’s spirit. Responding to God’s generosity, let us give to God in thanksgiving.

Dedication Prayer

We dedicate to you, generous God, our lives. Receive these offerings as a sign of our gratitude and commitment. Amen.

Scripture Reading, read by Darren Toms

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.

- I. In my home, as you probably know, we’re a couple weeks into remote learning for two kids, and just starting preschool with the third. It’s absolutely its own full-time job. To be honest, the hardest part isn’t actually doing the

work or helping them learn the information; it’s navigating all of the different apps and platforms and methods of correspondence. Once they get to the right website, they’re usually able to stay on track and learn from the lesson plans. But every once in a while I look over and see the math that they’re doing and I have no idea what I’m looking at. It’s certainly not the way I learned math. They don’t carry the 2 or borrow from 5. They do 10-frames and number-bonds and decomposing. Ultimately they come up with the same answer I would have using the math I learned, they just use a different process. Numbers haven’t changed and they never will. $2+2$ will always equal 4. We just teach a different way to get there.

- II. This week we’re really going to start digging into our Beatitudes series, and as we hear the Beatitudes for the second time-- last week from Charlotte and this week from Darren-- I’m thinking about the way that Jesus’ math never adds up the way we would have added it up. Jesus teaches a “different kind of math.” “Blessed are the poor in Spirit, blessed are those who mourn, blessed are the persecuted” simply doesn’t fit into our calculations about who we might assume to be blessed, fortunate, favored... lucky. It feels like $2+2$ doesn’t equal 4. Our calculations tell us that grieving does not add up to a blessing; poverty of spirit does not add up to a blessing, persecution does not equal a blessing, and here is Jesus adding it all up differently and telling us a new way.

- A. Jesus teaches this different way of doing math a lot throughout the Gospels: Leave the 99 sheep in pursuit of the one. Feed these 5000 people with only 5 loaves of bread and two fishes. The first shall be last and the last shall be first. Whoever loses their life for Jesus’ sake will find it. “Father forgive them, they know not what they’ve done.” In so many ways,

by any logical conclusion, Jesus' math just doesn't seem to add up.

- B. The math we learn through the value systems all throughout this world tells us that worth and value is all about earning, deserving, climbing up the social ladder, faking til you make it, who you know. The math of the world is about keeping score, cause and effect, about pulling yourself up by your bootstraps, and retribution. But Jesus sits down there on the top of the mountain and he looks out over the crowds and he says, "We're gonna add this up a different way." He teaches a new calculation: the Kingdom of God.
 - C. He teaches a way of adding that uses grace, forgiveness, inherent worth and dignity, enoughness, covenant, and promise. When we first see it, first hear about it, first watch someone do it this way, it's hard for us to imagine it would ever add up.
- III. Since we're at the beginning of this series on the Beatitudes, I want to make three foundational points about this incredibly important part of Jesus' ministry, and I'll probably refer back to them over time. The first is about the word Blessing and what it means; the second is about the way Jesus affirms and validates our feelings; the third one is about the future-oriented way in which Jesus blesses us.
- IV. So first, let's talk about the word Blessing.
- A. This word is the Greek, "Makarios." In addition to "blessed," it can mean happy, fortunate, well-off. The word "blessed" in and of itself is so full of meaning: Divine favor, unique standing, empowerment, given all that you need... and I think the most significant implication of this word is that

a blessing is not something you can pursue or earn. It is a promise granted; a gift received.

- B. Do you hear what I'm saying? I can't go out and purchase a blessing. Hard work and extra hours won't earn it. If I look hard enough and with the right strategy, I won't find it hidden away. We don't receive blessings by doing any kind of math. A blessing is a declaration of worth-- not because of something I did or might do, but because of who I am, because God created me and gifted me with a promise.
 - C. Makarios: blessed... means to receive unconditional consideration. It means you're not and will not be alone, that God abides. To be blessed is like you've been given a powerful gem that allows you to rise above whatever broken crack you find yourself in.
 - D. So last week I said that the overarching theme of the Beatitudes is, "God enters into our broken moments and calls us blessed." It's like this: God enters into our broken moments and hands us a gift, maybe like a little gem, which gives us the strength, the fortitude, the perseverance to rise up out of those moments with a sense of clarity about God's goodness and everlasting promise.
- V. Second, in the Beatitudes, Jesus validates and affirms the emotions of his listeners. In our passage, which we read last week and this, we begin with the end of Chapter 4. The end of chapter 4 emphasizes the physical healing Jesus did: "He went throughout Galilee, curing every disease and every sickness among the people.... they brought to him all the sick, those who were afflicted with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics, and he cured them." So while he began his ministry by healing many physical wounds and treating the physical health of his followers, here he invites them to sit around him on the

mountain and he directly addresses their emotional pain. He names that their feelings are real and doesn't dismiss them. Instead he says, "Even as you grieve, even as you mourn, the Grace of God enters in and blesses you." Jesus does NOT say, "you're blessed, so you don't need to mourn anymore." Jesus does NOT say, "you're blessed, so you don't have any problems." Jesus does NOT say, "you're blessed, so all of the pain of the world is removed from you." Instead he says, "I know this is hard. Your pain is real. Your emotional turmoil is legitimate. You're doing hard things. And within it all, you are STILL blessed."

- A. I don't know about you, but I need that promise. I deeply need the promise right now that it's okay if I'm not okay sometimes. I need to know that on a Wednesday morning when I'm trying to get my children on 3 different Zoom calls and remain present for the church I've been trusted to lead, and answer the automated phone call from my Gramma's nursing home, and make sure our bills are getting paid, and sufficiently savor the moment because children grow so fast, and keep up with the world and US news without reeling in pain, and speak up for the lives of the vulnerable, and manage my own and my family's mental and physical health, when I just kind of feel Spiritually depleted and emotionally exhausted... I deeply need the promise that even in those moments when I feel like I don't have enough of whatever I need, I remain endlessly blessed by an abiding God.
- B. I suspect you can think of times when you need that promise. When the grief is too heavy, when it feels like the world is against you, when the isolation is messing with your mind, when the longing is too intense, when you're stuck right in the middle of a conflict: Jesus says, "Blessed are you."

- VI. The third foundational point I want to make about the Beatitudes is about the sentence structure of each phrase. Each of the Beatitudes begins in the present tense and moves to future tense. In the original Greek there's not even a verb in the first part. It's not actually "blessed are those who mourn." It's more like this: "Those who mourn: Blessed." "The peacemakers: Blessed." "Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness: Blessed." But the second verb is there, and it's future tense. "For they will be comforted; they will inherit the earth; they will be filled; they will receive mercy; they will see God; they will be called Children of God." That is to say, the experience of the present doesn't predict the future. The Grace of God calls us to look forward in hope to something that is beyond this present moment. And then still, the Beatitudes are bookended with this promise that encompasses past, present, and future: theirs is (present tense) the Kingdom of God. It offers a sense that the Kingdom of God is not just theirs right now. It has been, it is now, and it always will be.
- VII. Collectively, we are in a moment in history that is less than ideal, and the Beatitudes give us this deep sense that even so, we remain Blessed. Jesus doesn't tell us to get over it and move on. He says, "I know this is hard. You're blessed. You're not alone. Yours is the Kingdom of God. And the future vision is so full of Hope."
- VIII. As we work our way through this series on the Beatitudes, I want to remind you again that the math of this world and the math of the Kingdom of God are not the same. We are so tempted to align our experiences with the common sense we've been taught through human value systems. The Blessedness Jesus offers us, the Kingdom of God we've inherited, simply will not conform to any formula of this world. So instead we're given an opportunity to write new narratives, to weave new garments, to speak of worth and

value in new ways, until the math we use shows us the ways in which every single person is worthy of a deep sense of love and belonging that cannot be earned by the value systems of this world but instead because of an inherent promise of a loving and abiding God.

- IX. This week, I invite you to start doing this calculation: No matter who you are and where you are on life's journey, you are blessed. Yours is the Kingdom of God. The future vision is so full of hope.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

God Moment, by Aubrey Shearn

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, by Mary Luti

Our worship has ended, but its gifts remain:
Tuck its praise inside you
Take its goodness with you.

Drink from its well of lasting peace.
Live by its light, its courage and grace,
And don't be afraid.

Seek to serve.
In plenty or want,
Find ways to share.

Discern the truth and tell it,
Resist all wrong,
And don't be afraid.

Regard all people as your people.

In hard times and good
Take care of yourself,
Take care of your people,
And don't be afraid.

And may the blessing of God, our life,
The friendship of Christ, our healer,
And the daring of the Spirit, our truth,
Be ours today, and every day to come.
Amen.