

Lakewood Congregational Church

A Congregation of the United Church of Christ

Sunday, September 6, 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

God, Show the Way

by J.S. Bach

Ben Liu, tenor; Ben Malkevitch, organ
(a remote collaboration)

Call to Worship

Join me in our spoken call to worship.

One: Praise God!

All: Sing to God a new song!

One: Give thanks to our Creator

All: We rejoice in our sovereign God

One: Let us praise God with dancing and music

All: Let the faithful sing for joy as we praise God together!

Invocation

As we gather here in your name, O Christ, you are already among us. Keep us open to your presence in us and around us that we may grow closer to you. Amen.

Hymn O Love That Wilt Not Let Me Go

Ben Malkevitch, baritone and organ

540 O Love That Wilt Not Let Me Go

1. O Love that wilt not let me go, I rest my
 2. O Light that fol-lowest all my way, I yield my
 3. O Joy that seek-est me through pain, I can - not
 4. O Cross that lift - est up my head, I dare not

wea - ry soul in thee; I give thee back the life I owe, that
 flick-ering torch to thee; my heart re- stores its bor- rowed ray, that
 close my heart to thee; I trace the rain- bow through the rain, and
 ask to fly from thee; I lay in dust life's glo - ry dead, and

in thine o- cean depths its flow may rich - er, full - er be.
 in thy sun- shine's blaze its day may bright- er, fair - er be.
 feel the prom- ise is not vain that morn shall tear - less be.
 from the ground there blos- soms red life that shall end - less be.

WORDS: George Matheson, 1882
 MUSIC: Albert L. Peace, 1884

ST. MARGARET
 88.886

Pastoral Prayer

When our hands are gripped by loneliness,
you clasp our wrists
to pull us into your heart.
When our lives are shattered
by the injustices done to those
passed over by the world,
your love puts us back together,
so we can serve them with your hope.
Emancipating God,
we praise you!

When we would build walls
between us and our neighbors,
you come to be the welcoming gate.
When we would curse someone
who has hurt us in our souls,
you sing us songs of blessing.
When we would focus only
on our needs and our desires,
you hand us the dinnerware
and ask us to set the Table.
Ever-near Salvation,
we would follow you!

When we would feed on
our bitter brokenness,
you would offer us
the Bread of reconciliation.
When we would grasp

the Cup of peace,
and drink it to the last drop,
you whisper, 'offer some
to those you don't like.'
Liberating Spirit,
we are always filled with you!

God in Community, Holy in One,
free us of all fears and doubts,
as we pray as Jesus has taught us,

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 Muriel Campbell

Psalm 149:1-5, 9b

Praise the Lord!

Sing to the Lord a new song,

his praise in the assembly of the faithful.
Let Israel be glad in its Maker;
let the children of Zion rejoice in their King.
Let them praise his name with dancing,
making melody to him with tambourine and lyre.
For the Lord takes pleasure in his people;
he adorns the humble with victory.
Let the faithful exult in glory;
let them sing for joy on their couches.
This is the glory of all God's faithful people.
Praise the Lord.

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.

Today is a transition week. All summer we have been following the Gospel of Matthew according to the lectionary, which has been a really wonderful experience. I want to remind you that if you want to deepen your Bible study related to the Gospel of Matthew, one of our church members, Karen Wagner spent all summer writing these beautiful reflection pieces each week, which we've been including on our blog. She paralleled them with the work of Parker Palmer in his book "Healing the Heart of

Democracy" which is a book worth reading right now. As we move into the fall, Karen has completed the reflections, and we've compiled them all into a packet in the church office so that if you want to look at them again, or look at them for the first time, they are available. I really recommend them as a way of processing your faith journey right now with everything going on in the world.

Starting next week, which is Rally Day, for worship and Faith Formation we're going to rewind a little bit and zoom in on Matthew's Beatitudes for a 12-week series, to really build some connections in our faith journey as an intergenerational church. So our services from now until the end of November will really focus on Matthew's Beatitudes.

Today's a transition week, though, as I said, so we're moving all the way over to the Psalms, for a moment to pause and offer God our praise. I'm reminded of a book I read in seminary by the Rev. Dr. Frank Thomas, called, "They Like to Never Quit Praisin' God." It's about the role of celebration in preaching, particularly reflecting on this history of Black homiletical traditions. The book begins with an account of a sermon entitled "Uncle Wash's Funeral" found in a slave narrative written by a man named Ned Walker around 1936. Ned Walker was a lay person who heard this funeral sermon sometime in 1866 or 67, but recalled it so vividly that he could write about it in 1936. What he shared about the funeral sermon was the way in which the preacher moved from profound anguish and suffering to praise. While the start of the service was so deeply filled with lament, and the sermon began with fear that Brother Wash might not make it into the heavenly realm, the preacher continued reflecting on points of scripture, Walker remembers the preacher shouting out over the crowd, "I see Brother Wash

as he enters in and Thank God, Thank God he has made it to paradise and he has landed safe forevermore.” And the congregation bursts forth in praise and celebration. In Ned Walker’s reflection on the sermon he says, “They see the assurance of grace and they like to never quit praising God.” So, that’s the book title, “They like to never quit praisin’ God.”

In our own Book of Worship for the United Church of Christ, the liturgy I use for every funeral and memorial service has a line in the introduction that goes, “We gather to hear God’s word of hope that can drive away our despair and move us to offer God our praise.”

Over these past several months, you have heard me speak about grief many times. I talked about Anticipatory Grief early on in our virtual set-up, about our collective grief over what we were losing and what we were afraid we might lose. I’ve talked about the losses, small and large, of expectations, of traditions, of relationships, of people we love. Often I’ve reminded you of the power of “feeling our feelings--” that when we experience an emotion, it is not good to push it away from us and pretend that everything is perfectly fine when it’s not. It is best for us to allow the feeling to wash over us, to hold it with authenticity and vulnerability, until we are ready to move on to the next feeling. I’ve reminded you of Brene Brown’s work on vulnerability, and her constant reminder that we cannot selectively numb. When we numb the painful emotions, we also numb the positive ones. I’ve reminded you that when the tears come, it’s okay to let them come. When the anger comes, let it come. When the anxiety comes, let it wash through you. We feel our feelings and let them flow through us because they are reasonable, they are legitimate, and they are a part of the

human emotional process. But I also hope I’ve been clear, and worry that sometimes I haven’t been clear enough, that because we’ve made room for those harder emotions, it means we’ve cleared the way for the positive ones to hold us even tighter. Grief is important, powerful, very real... but we cannot let it have the last word over us.

I end every sermon I preach with the words “Thanks be to God” for a reason. I do it because whatever we feel, whatever we experience, whatever road we walk and whatever we have to process about the current leg of our faith journey... in the end there will always be a blessing. That’s the entire story of our faith, right? The story of resurrection and redemption is the promise that in the end there will always be a blessing.

I chose Psalm 149 this week because, honestly, it was the Lectionary Psalm for the first Sunday in September, and it worked because it is a praise song. I guess it was somewhat a random Psalm choice, but I knew it was a good one. When I saw it, I said, “Let’s take a Sunday to pause and praise God.” And then I started really reading through it and it was a lovely Psalm: “Sing a new song!” the “Assembly of the faithful!” “Let us be glad in our Maker!” “dancing, making melody with tambourine and lyre!” I love it. I love it all. And then this happens: “Let the faithful exult in glory; let them sing for joy on their couches.”

Let them sing for joy on their couches. Did you hear that!? I had to look it up in different translations because I thought there’s no way I just read that right. So when I looked it up, I saw that the only variable from “couches” was the word “beds.” If only we could add porch swings, dining room tables, recliners, and

some of you who worship from your hospital and nursing home beds, it is the Psalm of church during a pandemic. Beloved, when we sing our hymns each week are we not singing for joy on our couches?

Surely this isn't quite what the Psalmist actually had in mind, but I love the way God's Word meets us where we are.

This is not our permanent reality. I promise you that. We will sing for joy from our pews again. But if we are not seizing the temporary moment we are in now to sing for joy from our couches, then we are missing the unbelievable ways in which God's grace can enter in through the cracks of whatever situation the world has given us.

Never, not one time in these six months, and far beyond that timeframe in each of our lives, has God let go of us. Never, not one time, has God failed to show us the beauty of God's covenant with us.

Now sometimes, when we're feeling our feels, when we're deep in despair, when we're angry at our community or resentful towards ourselves, we might not recognize the grip God has on us, but that doesn't mean God has let go; it means we are not in a state to recognize the power of God's presence. That's okay, so long as we don't allow that veil to stay between us for too long.

When I preach a sermon on praise, I always think of the times I spent preaching on Sundays at a state prison in Wisconsin. In a way I never expected, that place became a refuge for me to offer God my praise.

FLCI has a choir. It is a big group of men who stand up at the front of the chapel and sing, play keyboard, and keep a beat on the drumset or the tambourine. They like to never quit praising God. They raise their hands high, dance, and occasionally someone gets down on his knees in front of the chancel and weeps.

One man I came to know stood front and center with his face covered in tattoos. He praised God without restraint, and he sung so loud even if it was not so well. I knew a bit about his journey from our Restorative Justice course: trauma was the driving voice in his life until he turned to God; he worshiped his gang until a list of felonies required him to seek restoration; he needed to believe he is a whole person, worthy of love and belonging; and when he is in that chapel, he is able to touch the hem of Christ's garment. I also know that when he steps out of the refuge, the world calls him towards anger. His whole life will be a wrestling match between God's love and the world's greed.

And you see, not everyone was enthusiastic. There were men who sat in their chairs slouched over and weak-spirited, miserable and wounded. They were sad and in every kind of pain and it took all of their energy to drag themselves to that space, but they did so willingly. No one was required to go to Sunday chapel.

I think of them all often these days, knowing that the prison system is impacted in so many ways by Covid-19. I think of the ways they knew to keep praising God even from this rock bottom moment. I think of the ways they showed up to chapel even if

they were just going to let it wash over them as they slouched in their chairs.

And I guess this is my invitation to you: Show up to praise God. Show up to sing for joy on your couch. Show up to this sanctuary again when the time is right. Show up even when you're feeling a little slumped over, and when the feeling your feeling is miserable. Show up because when we hear the assurance of God's Grace, we can never quit praising God.

Amen.

God Moment, by Liz Spahr

In The Columns this month, we briefly introduced a new idea for church called "God Moments." We will have our first God Moment this week, from Liz Spahr, so you can get an idea of what we're talking about! 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 liturgist and share your God Moment in the same week.

Benediction

Let us go forth into the world
to meet all creation with the Spirit of Hope and Justice!

Postlude

Postlude in D

by Healey Willan

Ben Malkevitch, organ