

Lakewood Congregational Church

A Congregation of the United Church of Christ

Sunday, October 11, 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!

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 River Is Here by Andy Park

Noah Hamrick, bass; Ben Malkevitch, piano
(a remote collaboration)

Call to Worship

One: Praise be to God, who has brought us here this day.

All: Praise and thanks to God for all the blessings we have received.

One: What joy we have in God's presence!

All: What peace is brought to us in God's house!

One: This is truly the day that the Lord has made!

All: Let us rejoice and be glad in it! AMEN.

Invocation

Open our hearts and our spirits to hear your healing words of peace and love, O God. Help us be the people of service and justice that you have called us to be. Make us ready to heal rather than harm; to serve rather than sever. Give us hearts of joy and justice, for we offer this prayer in Jesus' Name. Amen.

Hymn

For Beauty of Meadows

LCC Virtual Choir

Gwen Delaney, soprano and alto; Ben Liu and Ben Malkevitch, tenors; Noah Hamrick, Tim Hampton, and Robert Wenz, basses
Ben Malkevitch, organ

For Beauty of Meadows

1. For beau - ty of mead - ows, for gran - deur of trees,
2. As stew - ards of beau - ty re - ceived at your hand,
3. Teach us once a - gain to be gar - deners in peace;

for flow - ers of wood - lands, for crea - tures of seas,
as crea - tures who hear your most ur - gent com - mand,
all na - ture a - round us is ours but on lease;

for all you cre - at - ed and gave us to share,
we turn from our waste - ful de - struc - tion of life,
your name we would hal - low in all that we do,

we praise you, Cre - a - tor, ex - tol - ling your care.
con - fess - ing our fail - ures, con - fess - ing our strife.
ful - fill - ing our call - ing, cre - at - ing with you.

Pastoral Prayer

Adapted from a prayer by Judith Watt

God of the abused, God of the homeless, God of the oppressed, God of the oppressor, God of the politician, God of the caregiver, God of the banker, God of the cook, God of the teacher, God of the physician, God of the police officer, God of every single last one of us, you are our God and we are your people. You are our God and we are your people in need.

We are your people in need because we see a world that is so in need of love and reconciliation, justice and the kind of peace that can come only when there is justice. We are your people in need because so many layers have been peeled off and we complain about the problems out there but we see also the problems within ourselves. And we are scared. So give us courage. Give us courage to see and call out the truth of sin and evil in the world, but also give us eyes that continue to see your hand in the midst of the fear and uneasiness.

Give hope to the hopeless, food to the hungry, love to the unlovable, humility to the greedy.

Lead us, O God, your people in need, to bring about a future when all people are seen as your people, when no one is an object to be disregarded. Give us courage to look within ourselves, to become aware of our own dismissals, our own sin, and the parts of our hearts that have become hardened for whatever reason. Remind us to be grateful—grateful for prayer, grateful for your merciful love and acceptance of us, grateful for your being a God who knows human suffering because you experienced it, grateful for the promise that nothing, that absolutely nothing, can separate us from you. We pray all of this in the name of Jesus, in whose death and resurrection we find

our own stories of death and resurrection and hope. Hear us as we pray, saying, Our Father . . .

Invitation to the Offering

Dedication Prayer

Gracious God, receive the gift of our lives and this offering of our service to carry your love from this place to a world in need. This we pray in the name of Christ, whom with you and the Holy Spirit, reign in our hearts and lives, one God now and forever. Amen.

Scripture Reading, read by Thom Geist

Matthew 5:5

‘Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Hebrews 12:1-2

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

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. We’re on our third Beatitude of our Beatitudes series. Blessed are the Meek for they will inherit the earth. To start, I want to give you a definition of the word “Meek,” because it’s often misinterpreted. Meekness is not weakness; it means “Strength under Control.” It is a controlled and humbled power. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth-- blessed are those who do not abuse their power and strength, but instead remain humble and intentional about their strength. It is these faithful ones who will inherit the earth. I’ll circle back in a bit, but for now, just take a moment to digest that definition. Meekness: strength under control.
- II. The New York Times has been publishing a series of stories on Resilience in troubled times. One story in the series from a couple weeks ago by Blair Braverman is entitled, “What My Sled Dogs Taught Me About Planning for the Unknown.” I was immediately intrigued by the article because so much feels unknown right now regarding the road ahead, and because I’ve been following the Iditarod every year since my 6th grade teacher introduced us to the race.
 - A. The writer points out that because of their strong instincts, sled dogs usually know a lot about nature, terrain, and their surroundings than their human mushers do, but the one thing they do not have the capacity to know is how far they’re going to run. She says that each time they hit the trail, they just run hard. It doesn’t matter if they’re going 5 miles or 1000 miles (which is the length of the Iditarod). All they know is to run hard. So, Braverman writes, “Asking sled dogs to pace themselves, to slow it down, is like asking a

retriever to fetch one ball out of three: it goes against their every instinct.”

- B. She writes about an important and surprising strategy-- that in long-distance mushing you have to front-load rest. So, for particularly long runs, it's important to rest early and often. She writes, “You're four hours into a four-day race and the dogs are charging down the trail, leaning into their momentum, barely getting started-- and then, despite their enthusiasm, it's time to stop. Make straw beds in the snow, take off their booties, build a fire, heat up some meat stew, and rest for a few hours. The dogs might not even sit down; they're howling, antsy to keep going. It doesn't matter. You rest. Four hours later, you rest again.” She explains that by front-loading rest, they build muscle and their metabolisms adjust, and they'll actually need less rest at the end of a trip. She continues on to say, “it's far easier to prevent fatigue than to recover from it.”
- C. I commend this strategy of front-loading rest to you for a number of reasons. In an immediate sense, it speaks to our pandemic. We don't know when this race is going to end. We have to consider how we might be strategic and intentional about pacing ourselves for an unknown distance, and an unseen ending. Be gentle and wise with yourself now. Rest often. But it's a strategy for our journey as followers of Jesus in every way, because we know that the Kingdom of God is beyond our vision; we do not know how long the race is.

III. What this sled race musher and writer is demonstrating in this strategy is meekness: strength under control. She is

expressing an intentionality with the strength of her dogs, that she knows what they're capable of-- that they could run for hours and hours right at the start of that race, and it might get them out front for the beginning of the journey, but once they hit the 200th mile, they might not have the perseverance to run that race that is set before them.

- A. I mentioned I've been following the Iditarod since 6th grade, and this point was really clarifying for me about something I've always seen-- that the front runners on day one don't last to the end of the race.

IV. We accompanied today's Beatitude with Hebrews: Let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. I chose that accompaniment to remind you that we are indeed on a race. It's not about speed, but it is a journey we're on to occupy and widen the overlap between Heaven and Earth, to make God's Kingdom known here and now so that every baby can be fat and healthy and rest upon a loving hip. It's the race in which we prioritize, as Jesus did, the lives of the marginalized and the vulnerable, so that each of God's Beloved Ones can recognize a secure sense of value, love, and belonging. It's a long race, and it's one without a predictable end, so I wonder about sharpening our sense of meekness--controlling our strength-- so we can run the race with perseverance.

V. You may know that I've been involved in the work of Greater Cleveland Congregations over the past several months, specifically working with the county on the development of a Crisis Diversion Center as a pre-booking alternative for criminal offenders with mental health and

addiction issues. As an aside, I'm always excited to talk about this work, so if anyone has questions please reach out; I can share a few articles about it or just talk about the process.

- A. Greater Cleveland Congregations is a non-partisan organization of faith communities in Cuyahoga County working together to build power for social justice. I have never worked with an organization like GCC before, and I think it has a lot to teach us about meekness and a theology of power-building.
- B. Until I began working with GCC, I was always under the impression, at least theologically, that human power was a negative thing because the Power belongs to God. Scripture, especially through the Prophets but also in the story of Jesus' birth and the words of his mother Mary, teaches us about humbling the powerful and disrupting those who are comfortable.
 - 1. How many Psalms have a stanza or two about dismantling the proud?
 - 2. How many Prophets condemn those in control of societal systems?
 - 3. And we recall Mary's Magnificat when she says, "God has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly."
- C. I have always wondered, wrestled, and been concerned about how and where power could fit into the work of discipleship, when scripture so often calls us to humility and renouncing our possessions. That's because I wrongly thought of humility, and I guess of meekness, as the surrendering of power rather than the strategic integration of it. In GCC, I have realized that what

the prophets, psalmists, disciples, and Jesus Christ himself are speaking up against is not power, wealth, and fame itself but the abuse, misdirection, and inadequate distribution and control of it.

- D. I've preached in this very sanctuary about how Mary is a Prophet, she is not "meek and mild" as we often hear. And listen, I still don't think she's mild, but I stand corrected that she's indeed meek— it is her meekness, her strength under control, that brings Jesus into the world and shields him from all threats of harm. It was her meekness that found her a place to stay and give birth, and it was by her meekness that she knew when to take her baby and flee to Egypt, how to love him and raise him, and to journey with him to the cross and through the grave.
 - E. As followers of Christ seeking to occupy the overlap between heaven and earth, we're called to a meekness that is not about surrendering and emptying ourselves until we're weak, but instead controlling and organizing the strength God has given us.
 - 1. What that means for us in GCC is that we seek to organize the power we each have and work together for social change that will reduce poverty, violence, and crime, and increase access to safe, affordable healthcare and housing, and quality education for all people.
- VI. In the Sermon on the Mount, we know that Jesus is speaking to a crowd of followers who have been marginalized, disenfranchised, and oppressed by the

Roman Empire. When Jesus says “Blessed are the meek,” he is naming the reality that those who held the power were not using it with humility and concern for the well-being of others. They were abusing power, hoarding land, and using their wealth to oppress and marginalize.

A. When Jesus says, “For they will inherit the earth.” He is revisiting Psalm 37:11: “The humble will have land for their own.” To own land was to have honor, a place in society, and a way to provide for the family. His followers were people whose land had been stolen and hoarded by those with power in the empire. Jesus proclaims that the meek—the gentle, the humble—are the ones who will inherit that land and in fact the whole earth, rather than those who have been using force and violence to abuse God’s creation for even more profit.

VII. I yearn... and I believe God yearns... for the day when the meek are the ones who hold the decision-making power for our world. That is simply not our reality today. Power continues to be abused by those who lead our systems throughout the world, and God knows that’s not going to change in a month simply because of an election, regardless of the outcome. We don’t know how long this race is before we see the day when we are committed to touching the Earth lightly and nourishing the life within it, to having control of our own strength and using it for the well-being of all rather than for self-interest. We don’t know how long the race is before the power is in the hands of those who respect God’s creation and land and love it for its beauty rather than exploiting it for personal gain, who observe the commandment to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. We simply do not know how long that will be.

A. But we know that Jesus proclaimed to a crowd of Disciples that in the long run, the meek will inherit the earth.

VIII. I think the reason I fell in love with the Iditarod so many years ago was because of its deep respect for the earth and for the forces of nature. These dogs and these mushers learn not to dominate and exploit the earth, but to steward it. They learn which ice will support them and what will not, which winds will move them and which will hold them back, what types of snow will drag them down and what that means for their bodies and their route, they know where the predators are and how to avoid them. There is a deep humility and partnership between God’s creation and those who run the race so that they do not drill a hole through God’s mountain to get where they need to go, but instead they watch the signs of the trail to know how the mountain will call them through it.

IX. Beloved, there is a power in meekness that will allow us to persevere and build strength for the journey. God calls us to front load rest, to listen to the cries of the earth and the cries of the poor and to respond, to organize the power in our community in pursuit of justice, and to humble ourselves to see that those who abuse their power out of greed might seem like frontrunners in the beginning, but will lose stamina along the way because they do not have the blessing that Christ has given to the meek. And in the end God’s Kingdom will indeed be made known on this glorious earth and the meek will inherit it.

I live with this hope for the future of our world, today and every day. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Benediction

May God bless you and keep you. May God's face shine upon you and be gracious to you and give you peace. Go in Peace.
Amen.

Postlude

Gigue by Hooke

Ben Malkevitch, organ

The Jaeckel two-manual Baroque organ in our chapel is designed to emulate instruments from three hundred years ago and lends an authentic sound to this gigue. The wooden stops pulled out on the left allow air to flow through various ranks of pipes tidily arrayed in the chamber directly behind the organ's console.