

Lakewood Congregational Church

A Congregation of the United Church of Christ

Sunday, October 25, 2020



Photo by Chris Lawton on Unsplash

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!

All Saint's Day Information: We are collecting names and photos
of loved ones we have loved and lost in this year for a virtual All
Saints Day worship service. Please send the names and a photo if
you have one of your loved ones lost this year to the church
office by October 29. We want to be able to honor their lives in
our service on November 1.

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

Turn, Turn, Turn by The Byrds
Chris and Rachel Burns

Call to Worship

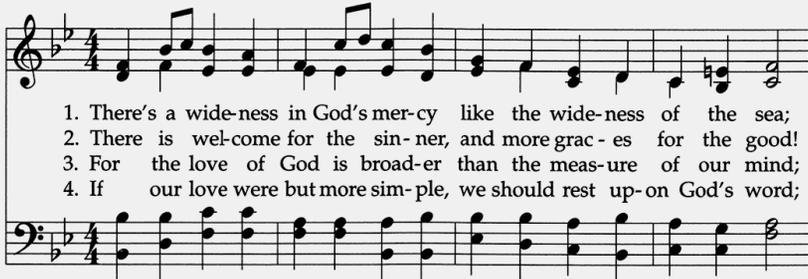
- One: You, O God, know our hearts.
All: **Guide our hearts, O God.**
One: You, O God, see our ways.
All: **Shape our ways, O God.**
One: You, O God, call our spirits.
All: **Call us now, O God, as we call on you.**

Invocation

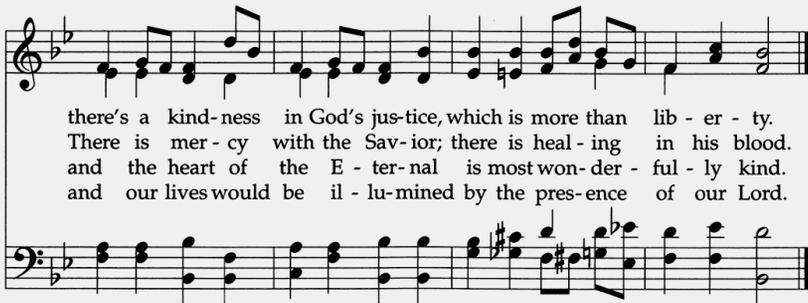
From our Illustrated Ministries Beatitudes Faith Formation Curriculum
Loving God, Thank you for your mercy and unbreakable love which hold us close to your heart, no matter what we do or feel. Please help us be merciful this week. We want to treat each person as you do, and show your mercy in all situations. Keep us connected to you and each other. Amen.

Hymn

There's a Wideness in God's Mercy



1. There's a wide-ness in God's mer-cy like the wide-ness of the sea;
2. There is wel-come for the sin-ner, and more grac-es for the good!
3. For the love of God is broad-er than the meas-ure of our mind;
4. If our love were but more sim-ple, we should rest up-on God's word;



there's a kind-ness in God's jus-tice, which is more than lib-er-ty.
There is mer-cy with the Sav-ior; there is heal-ing in his blood.
and the heart of the E-ter-nal is most won-der-ful-ly kind.
and our lives would be il-lu-mined by the pres-ence of our Lord.

LCC Virtual Choir

Pastoral Prayer

For those who are sick. Lord, hear our prayer.

For those who are bereaved and supporting the bereaved.

Lord, hear our prayer.

For those of us who are anxious and afraid.

Lord, hear our prayer.

For those of us feeling alone and isolated.

Lord, hear our prayer.

For those who have jobs that put them at risk.

Lord, hear our prayer.

For those of us who are especially vulnerable to infection.

Lord, hear our prayer.

For those who are confined to home but not safe at home.

Lord, hear our prayer.

For the children who need the safety and care of school and those who serve them.

Lord, hear our prayer.

For the teachers, who are forging a brand new way.

Lord, hear our prayer.

For the medical professionals and health care workers around the world.

Lord, hear our prayer.

For the scientists and researchers who are dedicating their lives to helping us - many of whom are under pressure and underfunded.

Lord, hear our prayer.

For our leaders. Who really need the strength and humility of discernment.

Lord, hear our prayer.

God, hold these petitions and hold us, bring us closer to one another and allow us to feel the ways our hearts are connected, and then let us join in the prayer our Savior taught us:

The Lord's Prayer

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

Let us praise God with our gifts of tithes and offerings.

Dedication Prayer

Holy God, you do not choose favorites, but you pour out your blessings on all of us, trusting that we will empty our hearts, our lives, our treasure in meeting the needs of those around us. Bless these gifts, and use them to bring healing and hope to your people. Amen.

Doxology

Praise God from whom all blessings flow.
Praise God all creatures here below.
Praise God above, ye heavenly hosts:
Creator, Christ and Holy Ghost. Amen.

Scripture Reading, read by Stephanie Fries

Matthew 5:7

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

Ecclesiastes 3:1-13

Everything Has Its Time

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:

a time to be born, and a time to die;
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;
a time to kill, and a time to heal;
a time to break down, and a time to build up;
a time to weep, and a time to laugh;
a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together;
a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
a time to seek, and a time to lose;

a time to keep, and a time to throw away;
a time to tear, and a time to sew;
a time to keep silence; and a time to speak;
a time to love, and time to hate;
a time for war, and a time for peace.

The God-Given Task

What gain have the workers from their toil? I have seen the business that God has given to everyone to be busy with. He has made everything suitable for its time; moreover, he has put a sense of past and future into their minds, yet they cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end. I know that there is nothing better for them than to be happy and enjoy themselves as long as they live; moreover, it is God's gift that all should eat and drink and take pleasure in all their toil.

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. When I was a kid, my brother and I and our neighborhood kids played outside all day every day in our yards and the woods behind my neighbor's house. We made concoctions out of natural elements and built structures to sit inside and climb on, and did all kinds of exploring the way children should. If you know me at all, you know that I'm a deeply empathetic person and for better or worse, I feel the pain of others as if it is my own. So in our cohort

of neighborhood kids, I had a pretty well-known identity as the child who tried to save all the animals we'd find in our adventures, and somehow those animals often found themselves along my path.

A. I remember, for example, at least a half dozen times when I found a baby bird who had fallen out of its nest, crying with a raspy chirp for its mama and- okay listen I know now this isn't the right thing to do, but just stick with me- I scooped them up and brought them to my body and held their tiny bones wrapped in wrinkly skin, and I'd run inside my house and my dad taught me this idea- again I'm not suggesting this is what we should do with baby birds but that's not the point- he taught me this idea that if we kind of put bread in water and then put it in the microwave and mashed it up, we could feed it to the baby birds and maybe, just maybe, they would survive. My parents were pretty good at preparing me for the likelihood that these animals would not survive, but we'd do what we could. So we'd put them in a shoebox with cotton and washcloths and put it behind the garage and giving it the most abundant life possible would be at the forefront of my mind for as long as it lived (which was usually like, one day).

1. I think what usually happened was that I'd go to school and my dad, who worked a very early morning shift, would get home from work before I got home from school and he'd check behind the garage and find that the baby bird had died and then he'd break the news to me when I got home, or he'd

hope I forgot about it which of course I didn't.

2. I think even when I'd try to feed them that bread, I always knew that death was inevitable, but I assumed they would die if I didn't rescue them too. In retrospect, I think I considered myself hospice care... loving them and nurturing them so they didn't feel so alone in their short lives.

B. The most notorious version of this story happened the time my cat brought me a baby garter snake, half-alive. I scooped it away from her and pulled it to my body and found a little cage, some grass and some water, some bugs, and I took that baby garter snake to church. I walked into that sanctuary like I had a special purse and sat it right next to me on the pew at the First Congregational Church of Berea, which is now a concert hall for Baldwin-Wallace University, and we sang a hymn and said a prayer and ran off to Sunday School and to coffee hour, and along the way all of the church ladies who thought I was the absolute cutest, because I was- I looked like Suzie but with even bigger hair- and I would say, "What do you have in that cage, Joanna?" and I'd confidently present to them a dying snake which was probably the last thing they expected and they probably regretted the question.

1. Again my parents prepared me that the snake wouldn't survive, but I think I believed the most merciful thing I could do was to accompany it on the last stage of its journey, or I guess force it to accompany

me, even giving it a chance to sing God's praises in its final hours.

2. I have many stories about practicing mercy as a kid. I certainly wasn't perfect. I also did and said hurtful things and made plenty of bad choices, but overall I was a person who showed kindness and mercy to people and creatures in need of support whether they deserved it or not. I know so many kids today who practice those same acts of mercy.

II. When I first started to pray on the Beatitude for today- Blessed are the merciful for they will receive mercy- I wondered about who Jesus is implying to be the giver of the mercy. Is it from other humans or from God? Because I'd argue that God whose Mercy is wide and expansive, offers mercy even to those who have never been merciful in return. If he's speaking of God's mercy, I'd stretch the Beatitude, if I were Jesus- which I'm clearly not- to say, "Blessed are the merciful and blessed are those who are not, for they will receive mercy." I know and worship a God whose mercy is wider than any decisions we might make or attitudes and lifestyles we might engage in. I know a God who, in the form of his Divine Son nailed to the cross, looked to the criminals who hung next to him and said to them, "truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise." I know a God who offered mercy to unjust judges and landowners, and those who were lost in their greed time and time again.

- A. Anne Lamott, in her book *Traveling Mercies*, writes of a wilderness experience in her life. She describes that she had slipped so low in her life that she believed not even God could love her, and

she recalls the words of an Episcopal Priest: "Annie, God has to love you. That's God's job."

- B. So I think it's essential, when understanding our identity as God's creation, that we remember God's mercy is ours whether we deserve it or not. God's mercy is for all people, even those who have caused deep harm and pain. It's God's job to love us.
- C. The more challenging Beatitude is if Jesus is implying that the merciful will receive mercy from other humans. It sounds simple and lovely, but God knows that's not always the case in the world as it is. Of course there are many times when compassion receives compassion in return, but there are many times when it doesn't... when our kindest intentions receive harshness in return, or when we ask for forgiveness and don't receive it, or even when someone extends mercy to us and we respond with harshness.
- D. The Beatitude feels so hopeful, in this sense. "In the kingdom of God, we will all be both givers and receivers of mercy." I don't know about you, but I want to make that Kingdom known here and now on this earth.

III. But mercy doesn't always come naturally to us, and it doesn't always fit into the systems and culture of this world. You know my favorite Thomas Merton quote: "Our job is to love others without stopping to inquire whether or not they are worthy," but we live in a world where we deem people worthy or unworthy at every turn. We might ask, "Does this person deserve my time, my money, my energy? Did this person earn this spot in the world or get there by luck? Is this person welcome in my home or not?"

Or we make judgment without recognizing God's image in the faces of those we judge: "that person should pull themselves up by their bootstraps; that person should be locked up forever; I hope Karma hits them on the way out." And at times we see people in need of attention and an act of kindness and, upon deeming them unworthy, we fail to act with mercy.

- IV. So to cure us from the temptation to be merciful to some and not to others, it is something we have to practice. Over, and over, and over again. That's why I shared those stories about myself as a child offering whatever mercy I could to animals when their future wasn't bright. I didn't know it, but I was practicing mercy by giving my time and attention to God's creation (even if I didn't know quite what was best for them). I wasn't always merciful as a child, and I'm certainly not now, but if we want to get closer to a world in which we are all both givers and receivers of mercy, we have to keep practicing.

- A. As an adult, I've practiced mercy at the bedside of patients in hospice care. Something I really miss in our current Covid reality. If you've been in that position, you know the little sponge straws that are used to wet the drying mouth of someone who no longer has the capacity to eat or drink on their own. It is a Holy and Sacred moment to put the sponge to their mouth and know that you have offered a moment of Mercy.
- B. I used to practice it a lot- all the time- when I was doing prison ministry and restorative justice work and I'd firmly shake the hands of men who had committed atrocious acts with those same hands, and look in their eyes and tell them that they matter to me because they matter God.

- C. I have practiced mercy with my husband and my children by setting aside my obligations to make them my priority when they are feeling overwhelmed, sad, or nostalgic for the world of 9 months ago.
- D. I practice mercy when I wear my mask to protect others outside of my home, and when I make decisions about social distancing that prioritize the lives and health of the vulnerable.
- E. I've seen so many of you practice mercy, and I'd invite you to think of some specific examples of what that has looked like in your life.

- V. And I've certainly failed to practice mercy too- when I don't get those priorities straight for my children and husband, when I judge someone by their poor choices rather than seeing them as mirrors of God's image, when I don't make the time to hold Vigil with people in need of gentle, spiritual care at the end of their lives, when I fail to make the phone call that's needed, or accept an apology and offer forgiveness in return. That's where Grace enters in and gives us a chance to try again.

- VI. The Good News is we have plenty of time to practice Mercy. For every matter under heaven, there is a moment to reflect, magnify, and amplify God's Mercy into this world. In every season: in birth and death, in planting and in plucking up, in killing and healing, in weeping and laughing, in mourning and in dancing, in seeking and in losing, in silence and speech, in war and in peace, we have the opportunity to recognize that each human and creature on and this glorious creation calls us to a wider and deeper understanding of love and belonging. For everything there is a season, and God has made it possible for us to reflect God's mercy into the world in

each one of those seasons, and to the Glory of God, the Kingdom is made known when we are both givers and receivers of that mercy.

VII. How will you practice mercy today? How will you make merciful behavior a rule in your life? Beloved, we are in a rough season. I have no doubt God will continue to follow us with Goodness and Mercy in this season. As the hands, feet, and voices of that God, it is my prayer that we will practice returning and reflecting that same goodness and mercy to everyone we meet in this season and every season.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

God Moment, by Vicki Smigelski

In The Columns, we introduced a new idea for church called "God Moments. This is a 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, go forth from this place, having mercy on God's creation, large and small, in the best ways that you know how, in the name of the Father, the Son, and Holy Spirit, one God, mother of us all. Amen

Postlude

Allegro in G by Veracini
Ben Malkevitch, organ

Our Mission Statement proclaims our common goal.

*We strive to be a welcoming,
worshipping community of faith,
helping people discover and deepen
their relationship with God, growing as
disciples of Christ, and reaching out in
faith and loving service.*

In keeping with the spirit of our Mission Statement,

*Lakewood Congregational Church,
United Church of Christ,
is an Open and Affirming congregation.
We welcome people of all sexual orientation,
ages, differing abilities, and ethnic, economic,
and racial backgrounds into
the full life and ministry of our church.
We declare this in the name of the Still Speaking God,
whose Son, Jesus Christ, welcomed
all people into God's circle of grace.*

