

Lakewood Congregational Church

A Congregation of the United Church of Christ

Sunday, November 22, 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!

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.

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

Thank You by Ben Fielding and Reuben Morgan
Ben Malkevitch, baritone and piano

Opening Prayer for Pandemic Gratitude

Adapted from a prayer by Rev. Elsa Cook
Inspired by Deuteronomy 8:7-18 and 2 Corinthians 9:6-15

O God, bring us
to that good land
full of your living water
and the abundance of
good things. Bring us
to that place where
we might be full
and satisfied
because
this nagging feeling
is exhausting.

This constant
agonizing feeling
that nothing will
get better and
nobody cares
because we can't
agree on what love
looks like now
just needs to stop.

We are not cheerful.
Don't ask that
of us, O God,
because we don't
have that in us.
Sorry. It's true.
Skip ahead
to the part
where we
give to the poor
and multiply the seeds
for the farmers
and bread bakers
except that we've confused
what we can do in this
great and terrible
pandemic wilderness
with what you can do.

Remind us
that gratitude
doesn't have to
turn over every table
but only had to turn
our hearts
to notice the indescribable
wonder of living in your love.
O God, with every
breath in our bodies,
help us to live
in our love
enough to praise
You with Thanksgiving. Amen.

Hymn *Praise Him*

Victoria Peacock, soprano; Ben Malkevitch, piano
(a remote collaboration)



1. Praise him! praise him! Je-sus, our bles-sed Re-deem - er! Sing, O Earth, his
2. Praise him! praise him! Je-sus, our bles-sed Re-deem - er! For our sins he
3. Praise him! praise him! Je-sus, our bles-sed Re-deem - er! Heaven - ly por - tals



won - der - ful love pro - claim! Hail him! hail him! high-est arch-an-gels in glo - ry;
suf - fered, and bled and died; he our Rock, our hope of e - ter-nal sal - va - tion,
loud with ho-san-nas ring! Je - sus, Sav - ior, reign-eth for-ev - er and ev - er;



strength and hon - or give to his ho - ly name! Like a shap - herd
hail him! hail him! Je - sus the cru - ci - fied. Sound his prais - es!
crown him! crown him! Proph-et and Priest and King! Christ is com - ing!



Je-sus will guard his chil-dren, in his arms he car-ries them all day long;
Je-sus who bore our sor-rows; love un - bound-ed, won-der - ful, deep and strong;
o - ver the world vic - to - rious, power and glo - ry un - to the Lord be - long;



Praise him! praise him! tell of his ex-cel-lent great-ness; praise him! praise him ev - er in joy-ful song!

Pastoral Prayer

Gracious and loving God, we turn to you who have created this world, you who rule this world. Not only did you create the world, but you entered into it in human form, in the body of Jesus, encountering the depth and breadth of humanity.

You suffered and died, as we humans do, and you brought us the hope of new life. Even from the cross you showed mercy and compassion. So this morning we come before you in prayer one

more time, lifting up our hopes and our sorrows, our fears and our dreams, our grief and our joy.

We bring you prayers for our own lives, for our loved ones, for our city of Chicago, for our nation, and for our world.

To those of us who are grieving today, bring your healing touch, and mend our broken hearts.

To those of us who are afraid, give protection, that we may all be safe. Remind us, when we forget, that you are our firm foundation. Our faith is built upon the rock that is your love and justice.

On this day when we acknowledge you as ruler of us all, we pray also for our elected leaders. Give them wisdom and integrity, God. May they truly serve all the people. Protect our democracy, and help us each to play our part.

Help us, O God, to place our trust in you and not in earthly things that rise and fall and pass away. You have been the ground of our being since before the beginning of time, and you will be our salvation forever. On you we can depend. Help us to remember that.

Make us into people of fierce and tender love, caring for each other, building strong communities, welcoming each other deeply, recognizing our own vulnerability, and not looking away from that. Give us hearts filled with gratitude for your many blessings, the big ones and the small ones. As we prepare to give thanks this week for all that we have received, help us to also give blessings to those around us and to the world.

Give us vision to see what needs to be seen. Give us courage to do what needs to be done. Guide our steps so that we may find ourselves following the path that Jesus set.

And let us also pray as Jesus taught us to pray, saying,

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

Generosity may come as an impulse, but it is cultivated by the practice of regular giving. Let us today move from beliefs to actions that make a difference in the world.

We give in gratitude for God's gifts to us, and we give because we need to live beyond ourselves. Use this time of offering as an opportunity to grow and to grow the realm of God.

Dedication Prayer

God of abundance, we give these offerings of material goods as our commitment to give back to you and to care for your people. Let our giving remind us to see Jesus all around us. Use our offerings of money and of our lives for ministry to your purposes. 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 Patti Komperda

Matthew 5:11-12

'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.'

Jeremiah 38: 1b-13

Jeremiah in the Cistern

Jeremiah was saying to all the people, Thus says the Lord, Those who stay in this city shall die by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence; but those who go out to the Chaldeans shall live; they shall have their lives as a prize of war, and live. Thus says the Lord, This city shall surely be handed over to the army of the king of Babylon and be taken. Then the officials said to the king, 'This man ought to be put to death, because he is discouraging the soldiers who are left in this city, and all the people, by speaking such words to them. For this man is not seeking the welfare of this people, but their harm.' King Zedekiah said, 'Here he is; he is in your hands; for the king is powerless against you.' So they took Jeremiah and threw him into the cistern of Malchiah, the king's son, which was in the court of the guard, letting Jeremiah down by ropes. Now there was no water in the cistern, but only mud, and Jeremiah sank in the mud.

Jeremiah Is Rescued by Ebed-melech

Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, a eunuch in the king's house, heard that they had put Jeremiah into the cistern. The king happened to be sitting at the Benjamin Gate, So Ebed-melech left the king's house and spoke to the king, 'My lord king, these men have acted wickedly in all they did to the prophet Jeremiah by

throwing him into the cistern to die there of hunger, for there is no bread left in the city.’ Then the king commanded Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, ‘Take three men with you from here, and pull the prophet Jeremiah up from the cistern before he dies.’ So Ebed-melech took the men with him and went to the house of the king, to a wardrobe of the storehouse, and took from there old rags and worn-out clothes, which he let down to Jeremiah in the cistern by ropes. Then Ebed-melech the Ethiopian said to Jeremiah, ‘Just put the rags and clothes between your armpits and the ropes.’ Jeremiah did so. Then they drew Jeremiah up by the ropes and pulled him out of the cistern. And Jeremiah remained in the court of the guard.

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. It’s been a few months since I’ve done Sermon Sliders, so that’s what I’m going to do again. Sermon Sliders are three little sermons instead of one big one... like the little cheeseburgers you get at a restaurant instead of one big burger.
 - A. The first sermon slider is going to tell you why I made Patti read that seemingly random passage from Jeremiah.
 - B. The second will be about framing our minds in joy and gratitude as we head into this Thanksgiving week.

- C. And the third one will be a theological framing of our county’s new stay-at-home advisory, to help make a connection between the difficult choices we’re making and our Covenant to love our neighbor as we love ourselves.
- II. So here we go. You are our Rock and our Redeemer, Amen.
 - A. I’ve told you before I had an English professor in college who identified as an atheist but would often say of the Bible: “If you actually open the thing you’ll find some of the most amazing stories ever written.”
 - B. We are on the final Beatitude of our Beatitudes series. Next week, we’ll wrap the series up with a summary and move into Advent at the same time, but this week we have: Jesus says, “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.”
 - C. I pulled this, a pretty fascinating snippet from the Book of Jeremiah, as an illustration of that final point in our beatitude: for in the same way they persecuted the prophets before you.
 - D. So this is a cool story... many, many chapters long so I just pulled a piece of it. I sometimes forget how much I love the literature of the Prophets.
 - E. The entire Book of Jeremiah is an address from the prophet to a suffering, hurting, exiled Israel under the reign of kings, but pursuing faithfulness to God. Jeremiah is called by God to speak some very harsh truths to the community, truths that rulers

and those in power do not want to hear. He reminds them of the pain they have brought upon themselves by following false idols, greed, power, and wealth, rather than following the Covenantal love of God, and they resist the hard lesson Jeremiah is trying to teach them until the very end. Jeremiah offers us an example of how to speak the truth in love in the midst of our struggles.

- F. So, okay, a little bit of context as we go into this story in Chapter 38. In the chapters leading up to it, we see this repetitive story of King Zedekiah seeking the advice of the prophet Jeremiah about what to do as the Babylonian army closes in on them. Each time, he prophesies what God has told him, but the King doesn't like what Jeremiah, or God, has to say. Jeremiah continues to tell Zedekiah, "I'm telling you that if we stay here, our people will be defeated and our city will be overcome." and the King doesn't want to hear that advice so he puts him in the Court of the Guard, which is jail, but Jeremiah keeps speaking out even there.
- G. What happens here in Chapter 38 is that those in power become so tired of hearing Jeremiah shouting, "I'm telling you that if we stay here, our people will be defeated and our city will be overcome." that they go to the King and they say, "please can we take him to a place where we can't hear him anymore." Like, if we ignore and muffle his prophecies maybe it will all just go away. So they take him and they throw him in a cistern...

like a big hole... to shut him up. There's no food or water... just mud. And he's sinking into it.

1. And this guy-- Ebed-melech the Ethiopian says to the King, "you can't just do that to him." There's a lot between the lines here. Ebed-melech is saying, I know you don't like what he's saying but throwing him in that pit isn't going to take away the truth of his prophecies. Just because you don't like it doesn't mean it's not true. He's still a prophet.
2. So then this very vivid, visual scene is written. They go and find old rags and they tie them together and lower them down into the cistern and they say to Jeremiah, "put this between your armpits and we will pull you up out of there." and they do, and they still keep him in prison you see. They put him back in the jail in the court of the guard.
3. But what happens next... this is after Patti stopped reading, but I'll tell you about it. What happens next is that the King sends for him again and says, "Don't hide anything from me. Tell me the whole truth." And Jeremiah says, "I can't because if I do you'll kill me, won't you? You won't follow my advice." and King Zedekiah says, "As the Lord lives, who gave us our lives, I will not put you to death." We see this shift in the King, this trusting in God's faithfulness... this willingness to hear the harsh truth from the Prophet because he finally recognizes that it

is God, not kings, who rule the world. Even in all his power, King Zedekiah remains accountable to a higher power. “Tell me the whole truth of what God is doing; don’t hold anything back.”

4. And this is just a small part of the story of this Prophet, it’s much larger than this, but I wanted to share this excerpt because it is one small moment in which we see that “in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before us.” It is indeed true that sometimes the faithful call of God is not what we want to hear. It is indeed true that sometimes the truth is just painful and we would do anything we can to just bury it and throw it away, to muffle the reality, to turn away from it. But just because we throw it in the cistern doesn’t mean it isn’t true.
5. And Jeremiah says, “I know this is not the truth you want to hear. But just obey and listen to the voice of the Lord and it will go well with you.”
6. I don’t know what this means in your life today, but this is the message: just because we don’t like it doesn’t mean it isn’t true. Trust in God’s abiding presence that if we listen, and follow, and remain faithful to God’s call, it will be okay. Thanks be to God. Amen.

III. You are our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

- A. Let’s talk about joy and gratitude as we head into Thanksgiving. Cultivating gratitude and joy as a life-giving force on a daily basis can truly change

the direction of our lives. There are nearly endless scientific studies that show that gratitude makes us healthier humans. Having an attitude of gratitude leads to stronger relationships, better sleep, lower blood pressure, and a stronger grip on our mental health patterns. Gratitude gives us more patience, more perseverance, and more resilience.

1. And sometimes it’s true that we feel as if there are more obstacles in life than we can handle. We focus more on the obstacles than the blessings.
2. I recently listened to an episode of the podcast “Freakonomics” in which they interview two psychology professors who published a study on something called the “Headwinds/Tailwinds Asymmetry.” It’s about our all-too-common tendency to focus on the obstacles in our lives (headwinds) and overlook blessings (tailwinds). This imbalance, if left unchecked overtime, leads us to feeling aggrieved and resentful. The study shows, I guess it’s kind of obvious but important, that focusing on the headwinds breeds bitterness while focusing on the tailwinds breeds appreciation.
3. When we express our gratitude and learn to practice it regularly and intentionally, we call attention to our tailwinds.
4. In our final beatitude, Jesus says, “Listen I know that people are going to revile you and persecute you and it’s going to be hard. It happened to the prophets and it’s going to happen to you. But rejoice and be glad, for

your reward is great in heaven.” Blessed are you. Focus on the tailwinds, and the headwinds won’t be so overwhelming.

5. Thanks be to God.

IV. You are our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

- A. This week Cuyahoga County issued a Stay at Home Advisory, encouraging us to only leave the house if necessary to slow the spread of Covid-19. There is deep concern about the capacity in our hospitals and the health and endurance of our Medical professionals and Hospital personnel. You all know this. I’m not telling you anything you haven’t heard.
- B. What I do want to make sure you hear is the way in which our Covenant to one another translates into and intersects with this Stay at Home Advisory. So I hope you will hear these words in a pastoral and authentic tone.
- C. I know that staying at home is taking a toll on all of our mental and often even physical health. I, too, am heartbroken about all that we’re missing. I long to put my cheek to my Gramma’s and watch my children embrace their Papa who is currently hospitalized with cancer complications. I yearn for a night out with friends and a building to send my kids to school.
- D. But, Beloved, the conditions of viral spread put the vulnerable at risk and the Gospel is so very clear about our commitment to the vulnerable. The rapidness of that spread right now is burdening our healthcare workers and hospital employees, many of whom are a part of our community, and our Baptismal and Membership Vows are so very clear

about our commitment to our siblings in Christ. The Gospel is clear what our call as Christians is at this moment. We are to love our neighbors, and to love them right now is to do everything in our power to keep them safe, to slow the spread of this virus, and to get creative in our support. What that means for us is reducing our movement around the community as much as possible, and increasing our remote connections to one another: letters, cards, phone calls, Zoom meetings, and so on.

- E. We cannot rush through a season we cannot control. Our ancestors know exile and they know patience, and they taught us consistently to watch for what is provided right in our midst. Watch what God is doing with us here and now. God is shaping us. If you rush, you will miss it.
- F. Trust me that we want and need you healthy on the other side of this. The most faithful way to love our neighbor today is to hunker down to the extent we can, and to witness the work of God in our midst.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Angel Tree Program by Christy Gray

Contact the Office (216-221-9555 or by the email link in today’s worship email) if you would like to be part of this year’s Angel Tree Program. Participants shop for 2 gifts (one clothing item and one “fun” gift). Items are returned wrapped to the church office and delivered by volunteers.

Benediction

Beloved, go forth from this place in gratitude and thanksgiving and encouraged, walking as a disciple of Christ. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, one God Mother of us all. Amen

Postlude

Vamudara (a traditional Shona song from Zimbabwe)
Tim Hampton, percussion

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.*

