

# Lakewood Congregational Church

*A Congregation of the United Church of Christ*

Sunday, November 8, 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](http://www.lcc-church.org)
- Call the church office at (216) 221-9555 to discuss other  
options

## Prelude

*Butsu Mutandari* (a Zimbabwean song)

Tim Hampton, percussion

## Call to Worship

Jesus said, "Come, all who are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest."

Come, all who carry grief and loss.

Come, all who carry loneliness and fear.

Come, all who carry grief and anger.

Come, all who have had it up to here.

Open our arms! Open our hands and do not hide what weighs us down. In this time, lay our burdens down before Christ and this community of faith. Come all together and find rest for our souls.

Let us worship God.

## Hymn

*For the Healing of the Nations*

1. For the heal-ing of the na-tions, God, we pray with one ac-cord;  
2. Lead us for-ward in - to free-dom; from de-spair your world re-lease,  
3. All that kills a - bun-dant liv-ing, let it from the earth be banned;  
4. You, Cre-a - tor God, have writ-ten your great name on hu-man-kind;

for a just and e - qual shar-ing of the things that earth af-fords;  
that, re-deemed from war and ha-tred, all may come and go in peace.  
pride of sta - tus, race, or school-ing, dog-mas that ob - scure your plan.  
for our grow-ing in your like-ness bring the life of Christ to mind,

to a life of love in ac - tion help us rise and pledge our  
Show us how through care and good-ness fear will die and hope in -  
In our com - mon quest for jus - tice may we hal - low life's brief  
that by our re - sponse and ser - vice earth its des - ti - ny may

word, (pledge our word) help us rise and pledge our word.  
crease, (hope in - crease) fear will die and hope in - crease.  
span, (life's brief span) may we hal - low life's brief span.  
find, (may find) earth its des - ti - ny may find.

LCC Virtual Choir

Gwendolyn DeLaney, soprano and alto; Michael Komperda and Ben Liu, tenors; Tim Hampton, Noah Hamrick, and Robert Wenz, basses; Ben Malkevitch, piano

## **Pastoral Prayer**

*(Adapted from a prayer by Rev. Stephen M. Fearing, Beaumont Presbyterian Church in Lexington, Kentucky)*

Giver of Every Mercy, we gather in this way to intercede on behalf of our neighbors, that we might live as the Beloved Community your Son gifted us the capacity to create.

You said, “Blessed are the poor in spirit.” Matt. 5:3

We pray for those who feel discouraged, disillusioned, and disgusted.

Gift them courage and energy that they may continue to fight the good fight of faith.

You said, “Blessed are those who mourn.” Matt. 5:4

We pray for those who have lost loved ones to COVID-19 and other causes. Gift them with comfort and peace that they may find hope for the future.

You said, “Blessed are the meek.” Matt. 5:5

We pray for those whose gentle voices of love are drowned out by hate. Gift us the ability to hear their message of compassion that we may be transformed by subversive love.

You said, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst.” Matt. 5:6

We pray for those who are hungry while the wealth gap widens. Gift them with food and clean water in abundance that they may live healthy and fruitful lives.

You said, “Blessed are the merciful.” Matt. 5:7

We pray for those who show mercy when it’s not fashionable or profitable. Gift them the strength to continue their work that we might learn from them and share their vision.

You said, “Blessed are the pure in heart. Matt. 5:8

We pray for those who show integrity in the midst of blatant assaults on truth and dignity. Gift them the resilience it takes to

remain steadfast in these times that they may continue to resist powers of tyranny and oppression.

You said, “Blessed are the peacemakers.” Matt. 5:9

We pray for those who have spoken truth to power these past six months. Gift them with holy impatience and determination that our message of justice and righteousness may ring out.

You said, “Blessed are those who are persecuted.” Matt. 5:10

We pray for our siblings who have been oppressed. Gift them with justice, freedom, and equality, that may have their due life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

You said, “Blessed are you when people utter all kinds of evil against you.” Matt. 5:11

We pray for those who have endured racist, sexist, and xenophobic rhetoric and actions. Gift them with a sure sense of your love for them that they may rest in the truth they they are beloved.

We lift these prayers to you, knowing that there is a special place in your heart for those who endure injustice and oppression. Lead us to a place of rejoicing through these difficult times, Matt. 5:12 and gather us together as your Beloved Community.

This we pray as you 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.**

## **Moment for Stewardship, Missy Toms**

### **Invitation to the Offering**

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

### **Dedication Prayer**

Gracious God, make these gifts a blessing to this world in this difficult time. Help us to transform this world into a better moment as we enter this next season. We pray this in your name, 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 Darren Toms**

### **Matthew 5:9**

‘Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

### **Isaiah 65:17-25**

For I am about to create new heavens  
and a new earth;  
the former things shall not be remembered  
or come to mind.  
But be glad and rejoice for ever  
in what I am creating;

for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy,  
and its people as a delight.  
I will rejoice in Jerusalem,  
and delight in my people;  
no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it,  
or the cry of distress.  
No more shall there be in it  
an infant that lives but a few days,  
or an old person who does not live out a lifetime;  
for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth,  
and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered  
accursed.  
They shall build houses and inhabit them;  
they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.  
They shall not build and another inhabit;  
they shall not plant and another eat;  
for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be,  
and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.  
They shall not labor in vain,  
or bear children for calamity;  
for they shall be offspring blessed by the Lord-  
and their descendants as well.  
Before they call I will answer,  
while they are yet speaking I will hear.  
The wolf and the lamb shall feed together,  
the lion shall eat straw like the ox;  
but the serpent-its food shall be dust!  
They shall not hurt or destroy  
on all my holy mountain, says the Lord.

## 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.

You may not know that we film our services on Thursday evenings, which is to say that this sermon was written without the winner of our 2020 presidential election declared. Now, I can say I have a pretty good idea of how this will play out in the coming days. But I speak to you today without a conclusive answer... in a liminal moment; an in-between moment. And I suspect that on Sunday, even if we have a basic answer to the question of who is our President-elect, we will remain in a liminal moment in the history of our nation and even our world, as we stand in the breach of a spiking pandemic and a transition into a new Presidential term.

I was taught to preach with the Bible in one hand and a newspaper in the other (that's the advice of Theologian Karl Barth, passed down through my seminary and many mentors) so I come to you today knowing that I cannot ignore that liminal moment in our news cycle and the broad impact that it is having in each of our minds, families, workplaces, and communities.

Now, I'll say this: It's a liminal moment in our news cycle but there is a steadfastness in our scripture and in our calling as Disciples of Jesus Christ. We know, beloved ones, what is right, in the words of Micah: "to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with our God." Our Christian story and Covenant is so very consistent that our job as followers of Christ is to occupy the overlap between Heaven and Earth, to respond faithfully to the needs of the lost, the last, the least, the marginalized and

the oppressed, and to love God, our neighbor, and ourselves. This is not news. This has not changed. This will not change.

We return to the liminal moment, the in-between moment, when we ask questions about how to live into this calling during a spiking pandemic and a transition into a new Presidential term.

Today with the news in one hand and the Bible in another, I want to talk about two things that we know with utter clarity:

We are a nation deeply and painfully divided. God is with us on this journey, with a promise of enduring and everlasting hope.

So I'll talk about one and then the other. Our Beatitude for today is "Blessed are the Peacemakers, for they will be called Children of God."

Peacemakers, Jesus says. Not peacekeepers. Peacekeepers are those who, in the words of Dr. King, "prefer the absence of tension to the presence of justice." Peacekeepers are those who remain silent in order to keep everyone calm. Peacekeepers are the ones who see the status quo and believe that any attempt to change it will require more conflict than they're willing to engage in.

But no it's not that. It's Blessed are the Peacemakers: making is an active verb... making peace, organizing peace, working within the tension and the conflict and the wound that is present among us and transforming a schism into Shalom, into a wholeness that is true peace. Peacemaking is working through justice, deep down to the base of the wound, to heal from the most pervasive pain all the way up to the surface, to achieve peace.

One thing I know with utter clarity is that we are a nation painfully divided. We are a nation not at peace with ourselves.

On a surface level, we acknowledge the language we have thrown at those who disagree with us, the boxes we have put each other in, the threats, the degradation, the insults we have hurled through social media, through pithy slogans, and even face to face... we cannot sweep any of this pain under the rug. At the same time, we are a nation painfully divided because of wounds far, far deeper: because of this country's history of stealing land from Native Tribes and capturing and enslaving Africans, and the ongoing and persistent oppression of Black, Indigenous, and people of Color, because of our insatiable greed and obsession with wealth and land and power, and – most of all– because of our constant insistence on being peacekeepers by burying and ignoring the division at the foundation of our history so that we don't have to be peacemakers by reconciling and repairing the harm.

Our Christian story is one of Jesus' life as a resistant leader, entangled in his persecution and pain and suffering, which lead to his death, followed by rising. It is the story of Jesus' ministry, death, and resurrection. Resistance, pain, then rising. Peacekeeping is the desire to skip straight to the rising... straight to reconciliation, straight to healing. Far too often, we have pretended that pain and oppression and justice-seeking confrontation aren't a part of the story. We've even painted this picture for our children in the way Holy Week and Easter are portrayed in most children's Bibles. The story jumps from smiling disciples at the Last Supper to the glowing and flowering resurrection. The Peacekeeping part of us tells the story that way: everyone was happy and then three days later everyone was happy again. We don't want to look confrontation and pain in the eye, because if we ignore the pain, life will be easier.

But we are called to be peacemakers not peacekeepers. The healing of our nation will take a significant amount of emotional, spiritual, and even physical work from every single one of us: a

willingness to dig deep down to our roots to heal our pain from the bottom up.

I accompanied "Blessed are the Peacemakers" with Isaiah this week: a passage of hope.

God speaks through Isaiah of the new heaven and new earth, reminding us that every day is a new opportunity and that in the words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice." The passage speaks of peace and justice and communal reconciliation. It brings us to the famous image of the wolf eating with the lamb, the lion eating with the ox.

It ends with the promise that someday, harm and destruction will end in God's realm.

I believe that someday we will be there. But it will require peacemakers. Before we can find ourselves in this moment of Shalom, we must interrupt the systems and the history that has created the schism. We have to acknowledge and comb out the harm that has been caused from every angle of the divide. We have to work intentionally to see one another, hear to one another, and open our hearts to empathy and compassion, and together bend the arc more firmly towards justice. First the discomfort, the confrontation, and the pain, then the rising. As much as I want to stand up here today and repeat God's words through the prophet Isaiah "they shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain" and see it become the reality tomorrow, I know that the healing of the nations will not come to pass without the grueling work of peacemaking.

There's a second thing I know with utter clarity. God is with us on this journey, with a promise of enduring and everlasting hope. It is because of this abiding presence that peacemaking does not

seem like an insurmountable task. It is because of this abiding presence that this liminal moment as we stand in the breach of a spiking pandemic and a transition into a new Presidential term does not drive us into overwhelming despair. The world around us is chaotic, and so many things we thought we knew seem to be slipping from our grasp. But this foundational promise of our faith holds firm: “...neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

We are a Body of Christ in a liminal time. God reminds us through the voice of Isaiah:

For I am about to create new heavens  
and a new earth;  
the former things shall not be remembered  
or come to mind.  
But be glad and rejoice for ever  
in what I am creating;

But while a new day means we’re entering another season, it does not mean the old season has been combed through and repaired and healed. After all, Isaiah’s words are “Rejoice forever in what I am creating” not “In what has been created.” It’s an ongoing journey that began as far back as when the earth began and is still happening yet today.

I felt healing this week in the words of American Poet Clarissa Pinkola Estes, who wrote:

“Ours is not the task of fixing the entire world all at once, but of stretching out to mend the part of the world that is within our reach. Any small, calm thing that one soul can do to help another soul, to assist some portion of this poor

suffering world, will help immensely. It is not given to us to know which acts or by whom, will cause the critical mass to tip toward an enduring good.”

I don’t know what has happened between Thursday evening and the time you watch this video. But it doesn’t change our calling to be peacemakers, to seek justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with God. It doesn’t change the fact that we are a nation and a people painfully divided, and God is calling us towards deep, intentional, peacemaking Shalom. And it doesn’t change the promise and the covenant that God walks alongside us every moment, in every season along the way. And through all of these certainties, we can step forward in joyful anticipation that the arc of the moral universe is bending towards justice; that the critical mass is tipping toward an enduring good.

It will be okay.  
Thanks be to God. Amen.

## **Children’s Song**

*Sorida* (a Zimbabwean greeting song)  
Teegan Barlow, Evelyn and Suzie D’Agostino, Anna Daso,  
Annelise Hampton, Anya, Evey, and Nate Lardi, Abbey and Tess  
Parker, Avery & Penny Spahr  
Ben Malkevitch, leader

## **God Moment by David and Laura Sangree**

Presentation on Zimbabwe and the Mt. Selinda hospital, this year’s UCC Global Mission focus from the Outreach Committee.

## **Benediction**

From the Talmud: “Do not be daunted by the enormity of the world’s grief. Do justice, now. Love mercy, now. Walk humbly, now. You are not obligated to complete the work but neither are you free to abandon it.”

## **Postlude**

*Chiro Cha Cho* (a Zimbabwean song)

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.*

