

# Lakewood Congregational Church

*A Congregation of the United Church of Christ*

Sunday, December 20, 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**

*Carol of the Bells* by Mykola Leontovych

Greater Cleveland Flute Society

## **Lighting of the Fourth Advent Candle**

Leader:

In our homes  
we gather around wreaths  
to pray our lost hopes,  
broken peace, limited joys,  
and love so hard to find and share  
in this stay-at-home season.  
We affirm that our candles mean  
we claim the power to call this season Advent,  
when God's light comes into the world  
and nothing can overcome it.  
We light the candles of hope, peace, and joy.

Second Leader:

We now light the candle of love  
even when many things dim our sparkling.

Leader:

God's love illuminates hatred and a compassionate heart  
and brightens the path to the birth of Christ.

Second Leader:

Emmanuel, God be with us in the week to come  
lighting hope, peace, joy and love on the wick of our  
lives, so that we may shine on our world  
your unconditional welcome to all. Amen.

**Advent Candle Lighting Song** by Ben Malkevitch

Sung by Avery and Penny Spahr; Evelyn, Amos, and Suzie  
D'Agostino

## **Pastoral Prayer**

Source of all life, in this season of waiting—waiting for Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love, waiting for reconciliation, waiting for an end to isolation—we find ourselves tired of waiting. Instead we yearn for the world to be made right. We yearn for open hearts and open minds, for justice and wholeness, and full bellies and warm homes for everyone. We yearn for all people to be valued and respected in equal measure.

Because we are impatient people who are not very good at waiting, we begin to rush—with errands and mindless busyness and words said too quickly and judgments formed in an instant. So we need you, O God, to give us patience and wisdom. We need you to give us the courage to wait through the obstacles. We need you to give us the compassion to wait for one another, and we need you to give us the faith to wait for the Messiah. We need you to give us the conviction to know when we've waited long enough, when it's time for us to act out of the justice-seeking love you have taught us.

O God, we really are tired of waiting for your peace to come into this world. Give us hope and light and the ability to wait some more and to work some more and to love some more—to be Christ-bearers in this world, day by day. In the name of Jesus the Christ, we pray to you as he did..

## **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.**

## **Hymn *Lift Up Your Heads***

LCC Virtual Choir

Victoria Peacock, soprano; Gwendolyn DeLaney, alto; Michael Komperda, tenor; Peter Hampton, Tim Hampton, and Robert Wenz, basses

Lift up your heads, O mighty gates;  
behold the glorious Ruler waits!  
The Sovereign One is drawing near;  
the Savior of the world is here.

Fling wide the portals of your heart;  
make it a temple, set apart  
from earthly use for heaven's employ,  
Adorned with prayer and love and joy.

Redeemer, come! We open wide  
our hearts to you; here, Christ, abide!  
Let us your inner presence feel,  
your grace and love in us reveal.

So come, our sovereign; enter in!  
Let ne and nobler life begin;  
your Holy Spirit guide us on,  
until the glorious crown be won.

## **Invitation to the Offering**

In struggle and in joy, God is faithful to us. We bring forth our offerings - our tithes, our treasures, our coins - to demonstrate our faithfulness to God.

## **Dedication Prayer**

O Faithful One, accept these gifts of our hearts and hands. May they be multiplied and magnified as the living presence of Christ in the world. 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 [Claire Stair](#)**

### **Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11**

#### **The Good News of Deliverance**

The spirit of the Lord God is upon me,  
because the Lord has anointed me;  
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,  
to bind up the broken-hearted,  
to proclaim liberty to the captives,  
and release to the prisoners;  
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour,  
and the day of vengeance of our God;  
to comfort all who mourn;  
to provide for those who mourn in Zion—  
to give them a garland instead of ashes,  
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,  
the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.  
They will be called oaks of righteousness,  
the planting of the Lord, to display his glory.  
They shall build up the ancient ruins,  
they shall raise up the former devastations;  
they shall repair the ruined cities,  
the devastations of many generations.

For I the Lord love justice,  
I hate robbery and wrongdoing;  
I will faithfully give them their recompense,  
and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.  
Their descendants shall be known among the nations,  
and their offspring among the peoples;  
all who see them shall acknowledge  
that they are a people whom the Lord has blessed.  
I will greatly rejoice in the Lord,  
my whole being shall exult in my God;  
for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation,  
he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,  
as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland,  
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.  
For as the earth brings forth its shoots,  
and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up,  
so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise  
to spring up before all the nations.

## 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. Today I am going to shorten my sermon a bit, and it's for a good reason. Because I am so, so, so excited for you all to see our first ever (and possibly only ever) Virtual Christmas pageant, which is going to be available on Youtube at the same time as this service, and I just really want to make sure that you take the time to watch it. I'll keep my words short so you'll have enough Zitsfleysh to watch two church videos today. (Those of you who are avid Virtch-attendees will remember Zitsfleysh from a sermon a preached in

August. It's a Yiddish word meaning "sitting flesh," which refers to how long a person can stay put in one spot).

- II. Our Isaiah passage today speaks about God's anointing and sending of the Prophet Isaiah. Isaiah announces what he's been called to do: to bring good news, heal, liberate, comfort, provide, repair, restore, and make way for the springing up of new life. Isaiah is used throughout Advent for many complex reasons that I won't get into right now, but just to summarize-- the themes throughout Isaiah are so clearly woven together with the coming of the Messiah. Isaiah's proclamation here in Isaiah 61 articulates a call we all have as people of God. God has anointed us all to shine forth and magnify the Glory of God in the way the Prophet Isaiah has been anointed to do.
- III. When the days feel particularly short and dark, this time of year, I recall a little town nestled in a valley in Norway, called Rjukan. I first learned about it through an article in The Guardian. Rjukan is filled with beautiful waterfalls and hiking trails; it's an active tourist destination and a home to about 3300 people. Where it's located, very far north, the sun moves low across the sky for much of the year, and because of the depth of the valley in which Rjukan is located, the village is only touched by sunlight for half of the year. So right on the other side of the valley on both sides, there is sunlight throughout the year, but Rjukan just happens to be deep enough in the valley that the sun can't reach them for six months of the year.
  - A. Now my first reaction was, honestly...why would you live there?? There are so many places in the world to live, why would you live in a deep valley with no sun for half the year? That doesn't make sense to me, but I'm sure there's more to it than I know.
  - B. Anyway, in 2013 they started using a fascinating invention. On a strategic sight on top of the mountains on one side of the village, they built

something called “Heliostats.” They are basically enormous mirrors, catching the sun from over the mountain and reflecting its rays down into the valley. The Heliostats are controlled by a computer to follow the path of the sun in order to catch the Sun’s rays for the maximum reflection down into the town. So for 6 months of the year, what they are seeing in their village is not actually the sunlight, but a reflection of the sunlight.

- C. Now when I first heard of this, I pictured that somehow, magically, the whole town would light up. I imagined that these mirrors reflected into the valley and it was as if they were hanging out on a tropical beach. But that’s not the case. This is what happens: the sunlight fills a small, concentrated patch of their market square— about 600 square meters. Through these Heliostats, the sunlight reaches Rjukan with an intensity of between 80% and 90% of the original intensity of the sun, but it only covers 600 square meters... about 6500 square feet.
  - D. So during those shadowy winter months, town inhabitants meet to chat in this bright and warm little splotch of sunlight. They bring their kids to run around and play. They bring the sick and the elderly out to sit and receive the healing power of natural sunlight. Doctors prescribe time in the patch of light to those who are battling depression.
  - E. I think this is completely fascinating.
- IV. During Advent, I love to hear and share stories about light. There are countless examples of the creative and poetic ways we have learned and adapted to bring light into our lives so that we are not overcome by the shadows: from candlelight to electricity, as a tool for art and performance and a medicine for seasonal affective disorder, as a

ceremonial reminder in flame and a decorative reminder on our trees. Sometimes it’s important for us to turn our faces towards those lights, as reminders that the shadows cannot swallow us up.

- V. Isaiah 61 is one of the most beautiful proclamations in all of our Holy Scripture. I really invite you to sit down with it and read it line by line, or to rewind and listen to Claire read it again, digesting each line. It is a promise to God’s people who are living in a particularly difficult season. The proclamation promises Good News, healing, liberation, comfort, provision, reparation, restoration, and the springing up of new life.
  - A. But perhaps the most relevant moment for us as hearers and readers of Isaiah’s words is this line: “The Lord has anointed me, and sent me.” These promises are not directly from God to God’s people, but instead from God through Isaiah to God’s people. Isaiah tells us that the work of good news, healing, liberation, comfort, provision, reparation, restoration, and the springing up of new seeds is not simply the direct work of God, but instead the sending, the anointing...the empowerment...of the prophet. For us today, this is a reminder that God uses God’s people to do God’s work in the world.
  - B. In Rjukan, Norway, three mirrors rest upon a mountain and they collect the light and the warmth of the Sun and they reflect it down into the square so that others may have warmth and light too.
  - C. As followers of Christ, as Disciples, as Prophets, as Children of God, we too receive the anointing that Isaiah received, and we too collect the promises of God and reflect them in our communities and connections so that others may also have those promises of good news, healing, liberation, comfort,

provision, reparation, restoration, and the springing up of new life.

- VI. Last week I reminded you that we, like Mary, are Theotokos; God-Bearers. This week I'm reminding you that we, like Isaiah, are anointed and sent by God. Just as we are empowered to give birth to God in this time and culture this Advent and Christmas, so too are we empowered to reflect God's grace and goodness, the light that shines in the shadows.
- VII. Now, hold this message with you for the remaining minutes of this service, and bring it on over to our virtual Christmas pageant, and watch as our children reflect God's grace and goodness, and invoke new life and promising, comforting, healing light.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

## **Benediction**

Let us go forth without fear,  
creating in our lives a space for  
the One who longs to dwell with us,  
to share our lives,  
and bless our world,  
and lead us into the Kingdom of Justice and Peace.  
In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. One  
God, Mother of us all. Amen.

## **Postlude**

*People, Look East*  
LCC Virtual Choir

***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.*

