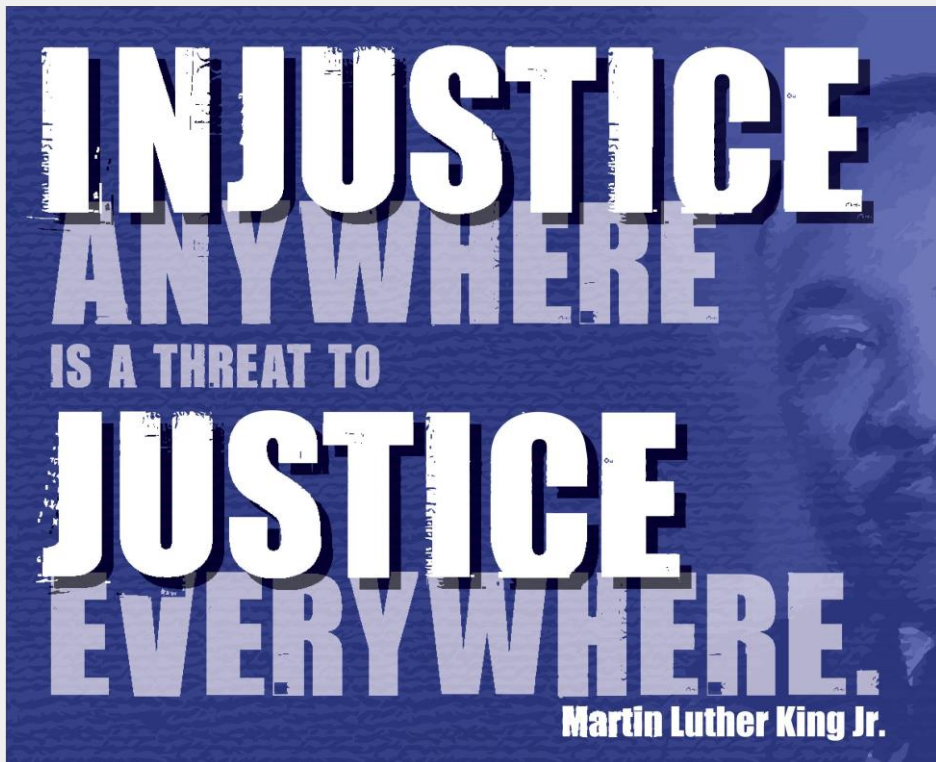


Lakewood Congregational Church

A Congregation of the United Church of Christ

Sunday, January 17, 2021



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

If you are new among us, welcome. Please know we are glad you're here; you're welcome in our remote community and you're welcome in our physical community when the time is right.

We will have an Annual Meeting at 11:00am, on Sunday, February 7th, via Zoom.

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 a loving God who welcomes us all. As I stand in this sanctuary I join my heart with you and I pray that you might feel the refuge of this space.

May the Peace of Christ be with you. Let us worship God.

Prelude

Shed a Little Light by James Taylor
Noah Hamrick, bass; Ben Malkevitch, piano
(a remote collaborations)

Call To Worship

Rock Tumbling Experiment Week 2

(see the video for more detail)

Trust in the Slow Work of God

By Teilard de Chardin

Above all, trust in the slow work of God.

We are quite naturally impatient in everything to reach the end without delay.

We should like to skip the intermediate stages.

We are impatient of being on the way to something unknown, something new.

And yet it is the law of all progress that it is made by passing through some stages of instability—and that it may take a very long time.

And so I think it is with you; your ideas mature gradually—let them grow, let them shape themselves, without undue haste.

Don't try to force them on, as though you could be today what time (that is to say, grace and circumstances acting on your own good will)

will make of you tomorrow.

Only God could say what this new spirit gradually forming within you will be.

Give Our Lord the benefit of believing that his hand is leading you, and accept the anxiety of feeling yourself in suspense and incomplete.

Hymn *O for a World*



1. O for a world where ev - ery - one re -
2. O for a world where goods are shared and
3. We wel - come one world fam - i - ly and
4. The poor are rich, the weak are strong, the
5. O for a world pre - par - ing for God's



1. spect each oth - er's ways, where love is lived and
2. mis - er - y re - lieved, where truth is spo - ken,
3. strug - gle with each choice that o - pens us to
4. fool - ish ones are wise. Tell all who mourn; out -
5. glo - rious reign of peace, where time and tears will



1. all is done with jus - tice and with praise.
2. chil - dren spared, e - qual - i - ty a - chieved.
3. u - ni - ty and gives our vi - sion voice.
4. casts be - long, who per - ish - es will rise.
5. be no more, and all but love will cease.

LCC Virtual Choir

Victoria Peacock, soprano; Gwendolyn DeLaney, alto; Peter Hampton, Michael Komperda, Ben Liu, tenors; Noah Hamrick, Tim Hampton, and Robert Wenz, basses

Litany Against White Supremacy

by Revs. Elizabeth Rawlings and Jennifer Chrien
Read by Students in our LCC Confirmation Class

Rachel:

On this MLK Weekend, we've invited many of our confirmation students to share in reading this Litany Against White Supremacy by Rev. Elizabeth Rawling and Rev. Jennifer Chrien. The youth of our church are passionate about social justice concerns and building a better future for people, and we are so grateful for them.

Elizabeth:

Gracious and loving God,

In the beginning, you created humanity and declared us very good

We were made in Africa, came out of Egypt.

Our beginnings, all of our beginnings, are rooted in dark skin.

We are all siblings. We are all related.

We are all your children.

All: We are all siblings, we are all related, we are all your children.

Nate:

Violence entered creation through Cain and Abel.

Born of jealousy, rooted in fear of scarcity,

Brother turned against brother

The soil soaked with blood, Cain asked, "Am I my brother's keeper?"

All: We are all siblings, we are all related, we are our brother's keeper.

Anna:

When your people cried out in slavery,
You heard them. You did not ignore their suffering.
You raised up leaders who would speak truth to power
And lead your people into freedom.

Let us hear your voice; grant us the courage to answer your call.
Guide us towards justice and freedom for all people.

All: We are all siblings, we are all related, we all deserve to be free.

Helen:

Through the prophets you told us the worship you want is for us
to loose the bonds of injustice,
to undo the thongs of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke;

Ruby:

Yet we continue to serve our own interest,
To oppress our workers, to crush our siblings by the neck
because we are afraid.
Because they don't look like us, act like us, talk like us.
Yet, they are us. And we are them.

All: We are all siblings, we are all related, we are not free unless all are free

David:

In great love you sent to us Jesus, your Son,
Born in poverty, living under the rule of a foreign empire,
Brown-skinned, dark-haired, middle-Eastern.
They called him Yeshua, your Son,
Who welcomed the unwelcome, accepted the unacceptable--
The foreigners, the radicals, the illiterate, the poor,
The agents of empire and the ones who sought to overthrow it,

The men and women who were deemed unclean because of their maladies.

All: We are all siblings, we are all related, we are all disciples.

Lilly:

The faith of Christ spread from region to region, culture to culture.

You delight in the many voices, many languages, raised to you. You teach us that in Christ, “There is no Jew or Greek, there is no slave or free, there is no male and female.”

In Christ, we are all one.

Not in spite of our differences, but in them.

Black, brown, and white; female, non-binary, and male; citizen and immigrant,

In Christ we are all one.

All: We are all siblings, we are all related, we are all one in Christ.

Shannon:

Each week, we confess our sin to you and to one another.

We know that we are in bondage to sin and cannot free ourselves.

We are captive to the sin of white supremacy,

Which values some lives more than others,

Which believes some skin tones are more perfect than others,

Which commits violence against those who are different.

We confess our complicity in this sin.

We humbly repent.

We ask for the strength to face our sin, to dismantle it, and to be made anew

We trust in your compassion and rely on your mercy

Praying that you will give us your wisdom and guide us in your way of peace,

That you will renew us as you renew all of creation

In accordance with your will.

We ask this, we pray this, as your children:

All: all siblings, all related, all beloved children of God.

Video: March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom

By The Salt Project, offered for Congregational Use this weekend (<https://vimeo.com/383154903>)

Pastoral Prayer

A sharing of what’s on my heart-- “Pray without ceasing.”

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

Beloved children of God, too often we see the world through a lens of scarcity. We look at all the things we do not have or wish for something bigger and better. And yet, our stories of faith tell us that the smallest things often become enormous when placed in God’s hands. And so, you are invited to bring your “little” and watch how God can do great things to bless the entire community.

Dedication Prayer

We continue to dream the impossible because of our faith in your power. And so, we dedicate our lives to changing the “normalcy” that continues to plague our communities and society. The only normalcy that we will settle for is the normalcy that recognizes the dignity and worth of all of God’s children. The only normalcy that we will settle for is the normalcy that allows judgment to run down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream. The only normalcy that we will settle for is the normalcy of brotherhood [and sisterhood], the normalcy of true peace, the normalcy of justice.*

Scripture Reading, read by Patti Komperda

John 1:35-51

The First Disciples of Jesus

The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, ‘Look, here is the Lamb of God!’ The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, ‘What are you looking for?’ They said to him, ‘Rabbi’ (which translated means Teacher), ‘where are you staying?’ He said to them, ‘Come and see.’ They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o’clock in the afternoon. One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. He first found his brother Simon and said to him, ‘We have found the Messiah’ (which is translated Anointed). He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, ‘You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas’ (which is translated Peter).

Jesus Calls Philip and Nathanael

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, ‘Follow me.’ Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, ‘We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth.’ Nathanael said to him, ‘Can anything good come out of Nazareth?’ Philip said to him, ‘Come and see.’ When Jesus saw Nathanael coming towards him, he said of him, ‘Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!’ Nathanael asked him, ‘Where did you come to know me?’ Jesus answered, ‘I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.’ Nathanael replied, ‘Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!’ Jesus answered, ‘Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.’ And he said to him, ‘Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.’

Message

God may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts in this hour be acceptable in your sight, for you are our rock and our redeemer Amen.

If this were any other year, it would be Homeless Awareness Sleepout Weekend (HASO). For many years, our youth have been sleeping on the front steps of our church in boxes on the Saturday night of MLK Weekend, to raise awareness around homelessness and housing instability, and raise money for agencies and organizations that work to end homelessness in our area. While of course one night out of the year doesn’t tackle the complexity of housing instability, it does offer a lens through which our youth and our community can begin to understand our call as followers of Jesus Christ to love and serve our homeless neighbors. This

year, a year when perhaps we need to raise awareness more than ever before, it just wasn't feasible or safe to participate in the activity as usual. Rachel is in conversation with some community partners to offer our youth an opportunity to raise awareness and serve our community, so stay tuned for more information about that.

For the past two years on the Sunday following HASO, I've given a couple statistics from the Northeast Ohio Coalition on Homelessness, and I want to go ahead and continue with that today. What our youth witness to each January is a very real illness in our highly-developed nation, and as Christ followers we cannot look away. These are pre-Covid numbers, from 2019, but they're the most recent statistics the NEOCH has because, the reality is, we have not even begun to see the impact of Covid-19 on homelessness and poverty, and the cycles of both, and we're just at a point where we can collect meaningful statistics. So, pre-covid--

- the estimate, which is incredibly hard to track, is that around 23,000 people in our county experience homelessness throughout the course of a year, and around 4,000 people on any given night.
- The federal poverty line is just above \$12,000 for an individual and just above \$24,000 for a family of four, and yet we know that a single parent would need to work 73 hours a week at the current minimum wage to afford a two bedroom apartment.
- While the Northeast Ohio Coalition for Homelessness would estimate that there are 77,000 people in need of subsidized housing in Northeast Ohio, the waitlist of such housing is years and even sometimes decades long, because there are only 710 units of

permanent affordable housing in the city of Cleveland.

- We can't speak about homelessness on MLK Weekend without speaking about Racial disparity, so I have to tell you it is true that 70% of the men, women, and children using our homeless shelters in Cuyahoga County are black, and 25% are Latino. It is therefore true that more than 95% of the people who enter the shelters in *this county* are people of color. Those racial disparities exist in almost every statistic we look at in our nation, including the fact that during this pandemic, Black people have died of Covid-19 at 1.6x the rate of white people nationwide.¹

Trust in the slow work of God.

I have to tell you that I do not believe homelessness is an unconquerable fact of our world. While it has been the story of our history and our present, it does not need to be the story of our future. I believe that a world where every person has a safe shelter and every baby on every hip is fat and healthy is possible. And while I will do everything I can to trust in the slow work of God, I am also committed to hastening that day in whatever way I'm called. Because even if the work of God is slow, I also remember the words of Jacob Riis who said: "When nothing seems to help, I go and look at a stonecutter hammering away at his rock, perhaps a hundred times without as much as a crack showing in it. Yet at the hundred and first blow it will split in two, and I know it was not that last blow that did it, but all that had gone before."

¹ <https://covidtracking.com/race>

I have to wonder if we are approaching the 101st blow during this pandemic; if perhaps this global crisis is breaking us open to the need for reconciliation and healing... if perhaps the long-arc of the universe is bending a little more steadily towards justice... if perhaps we are inching closer to Rev. Dr. King's image of Beloved Community, described by the King Center in this way: "In the Beloved Community, poverty, hunger and homelessness will not be tolerated because international standards of human decency will not allow it. Racism and all forms of discrimination, bigotry and prejudice will be replaced by an all-inclusive spirit of siblinghood. Love and trust will triumph over fear and hatred. Peace with justice will prevail over war and military conflict."

One of the reasons we have historically participated in the Homeless Awareness Sleep Out is to create a small sense of solidarity; of shared humanity. It allows us to recognize the shared humanity between ourselves and our homeless siblings.

Our Gospel from this week is a call story: The call of John, the call of Andrew, the call of Simon, the call of Philip, and then the call of Nathanael. We see this repetition of this phrase: come and see, come and see, come and see. "I'm calling you now, and I promise that when you see what I'm talking about you'll want to come with us." So each of the Disciples who hears the call chooses to follow, and then when they get to Nathanael, they call him to come along and he responds with this: "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"

This is the type of question someone might ask when they are failing to recognize shared humanity, Beloved community, the all-inclusive spirit of siblinghood. It is a diminishing, a disempowering, of people from a specific culture or context.... And it is something that we all do far too often.

Putting people outside the realm of worthiness will never produce Beloved Community.

- I. And this is really at the core of Jesus' teachings. To be a follower of Christ is to proclaim the worthiness of every individual, especially the lost, the last, the least, the marginalized and the oppressed not because of who they could be, but because who they are is God's beloved. That's the story. We see it over and over again--
 - John said, "I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal" and Jesus said come, baptize me, follow me, I will wash your feet, I will break bread with you.
 - At Simon's house the whole city gathered around the door and crowds of the sick and possessed entered into Simon's house and Jesus healed them and cast out their demons.
 - The leper looked at Jesus and said, "If you choose, you can make me clean." and Jesus did choose... Jesus touched him, and showed him mercy.
 - The man with the withered hand said, "it is the sabbath so you cannot heal me" and Jesus said, "You are worthy on the sabbath and on any other day."
 - The hemorrhaging woman suffered for 12 years, and the town was annoyed with her and tired of her complaining and she simply touched the hem of his garment and she was healed.
 - Jesus went into his hometown and they told him that he is not worthy and he dusted off his sandals and he moved on.
 - He told the Syrophonecian woman that she was not worthy of the crumbs under the table and she said, "Yes Jesus you have called us all worthy, remember?" and he remembered her worthiness, and he healed her daughter.

- The poor widow put in two coins and he said, this is everything.
- He sat around a table with tax collectors and sinners and prostitutes and he looked at them and loved them and he said, “You will become my deserters, you will betray me, and still. Still. This is my body broken for you.”
- On the cross he hung with one thief on his right and one on his left and he said, “You, too, will be with me in paradise.”
- To be a follower of Christ is to proclaim the worthiness of every individual, especially the lost, the last, the least, the marginalized and oppressed...not because of who they could be but because who they are is God’s beloved.

II. Nathanael’s question asks something about worthiness.

- Nathanael looked at Philip, who had just told him about Jesus, son of Joseph of Nazareth, and asked, “But can anything good come out of Nazareth?” The response is “Come and see” because Philip wants him to see that Goodness can come out of anything and everything by the Grace and Glory of God. And I think of how often we ask that question about various parts of our world or society that we have deemed unworthy or less than ideal or other than us. And the answer, to God, is always and every time, “yes.”

III. So can anything good come out of Nazareth? Yes.

- Can anything good come out of homeless shelters? Yes.
- Can anything good come out of Mexico or Haiti or Russia or Pittsburg? Yes.
- Can anything good come out of the prisons? Yes.

- Can anything good come out of brothels? Yes.
- Can anything good come out of Washington D.C.? Yes.
- Can anything good come out of my enemy? Yes.
- Can anything good come out of this pandemic? Yes.
- Can anything good come out of my damaged and broken heart? Yes.
- Can anything good come out of my confused and disoriented mind? Yes.
- Can anything good come out of the disabled, the debilitated, the uneducated, the desperately poor? Yes.
- Can anything good come out of anything and everything at all? Yes.

To be a follower of Christ is to proclaim the worthiness of every individual, especially the lost, the last, the least, the marginalized and oppressed not because of who they could become but because who they are is beloved.

IV. In so many ways, we have become a merit-based society. Our competitive nature has driven us to only want the best and the brightest, to show favoritism and priority to those who match our understanding of successful or high-potential. And the harm that is caused is a different kind of brokenness--it is perfectionism, scarcity, comparison, self-doubt, anxiety, exhaustion as a status symbol, supremacy...all that prevent us from beloved community...that lead us to broken relationships within ourselves, among one another, and with God. And it is not the way that has been taught to us by Jesus Christ. It is the way that has been taught to us by structures of unequal power that have lived on and evolved and formed our societies from the beginning of time.

- V. And you see all of this has to do with that incredible man and his profound mission that we celebrate this weekend - Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.-- who called us to tear down the systems of power that call some people worthy and others not... who warned us about the sneakiness of white supremacy and the ways that it creeps in even when we don't think we are racist... who admonished us about our silence and complicity and the ways that we implicitly call some more worthy than others.
- VI. We are not free to abandon Dr. King's mission, sisters and brothers, which is of course Jesus's mission, until every person across this world knows of their worthiness and their belovedness... until we are quite clear that the answer to "can anything good come out of [any place]" is yes.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

***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.

Benediction

We leave empowered by the fresh winds of change and the dream that is before us to be God's hands, and feet and heart in this world today, tomorrow and forever. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. One God, Mother of us all. Amen.

Postlude

Simple Gifts, arr. Lyn Joyner

Ben Malkevitch, organ

Photos taken in Ohio and Tennessee by Ben Malkevitch

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

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.*

