

Lakewood Congregational Church

A Congregation of the United Church of Christ

Sunday, February 14, 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.

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

"Love" Round

Audrey, Julie, and Lindy Warren, vocals
Please sing along!

Call to Worship

Love is... God
Love is... Patience
Love is... Community
Love is... Laughter
Love is... [say your own words]
Love is... [say your own words]
Love is... [say your own words]
Love is God, and God is love. Let us worship.

Hymn *The Gift of Love*

LCC Virtual Choir

Gwendolyn DeLaney and Victoria Peacock, sopranos;

Gwendolyn DeLaney, alto; Steve Hotchkiss, Michael Komperda,

Ben Liu, tenors; Noah Hamrick, Peter Hampton, Tim Hampton,

Robert Wenz, basses

Ben Malkevitch, piano

1. Though I may speak with brav - est fire, and have the gift
2. Though I may give all I pos - sess, and striv - ing so
3. Come, Spir - it, come, our hearts con - trol, our spir - its long

— to all in - spire, and have not love, — my words are
— my love pro - fess, but not be given — by love with -
— to be made whole. Let in - ward love — guide ev - ery

vain, — as sound - ing brass, — and hope - less gain.
in, — the pro - fit soon — turns strange - ly thin.
deed; — by this we wor - ship and are freed.

Pastoral Prayer

“Create in Me a Clean Heart, O Lord” a poem inspired by Psalm 51:10; adapted from a Call to Worship by Rev. Kathryn M. Schreiber

(as you read or recite the poem, notice which lines stand out)

When I am soiled by another’s pain and seek revenge,
Create in me a Clean Heart, O Lord.

When I am clouded by accumulating disappointments,
Create in me a Patient Heart, O Lord.

When I am fed by the work of others,
Create in me an Appreciative Heart, O Lord.

When I am in pain and aware of physical limitation,
Create in me a Soulful Heart, O Lord.

When I am unexpectedly smitten with wonder,
Create in me a Joyful Heart, O Lord.

When I am overcome by systemic oppression,
Create in me a Prophet’s Heart, O Lord.

When I am grumpy about my personal relationships,
Create in me a Loving Heart, O Lord.

When I am hiding in the forest of distraction,
Create in me a Curious Heart, O Lord.

When I am resonating with love for Dear Ones,
Create in me a Grateful Heart, O Lord.

When I am rigid and holding court,
Create in me an Open Heart, O Lord.

When I am carrying heavy suitcases filled with hurt,
Create in me a Forgiving Heart, O Lord.

When I am enchanted with the play of colors,
Create in me an Artist’s Heart, O Lord.

When I am sad and swallowed by loss,
Create in me an Eternal Heart, O Lord.

When I am proudly self-important,
Create in me a Humble Heart, O Lord.

When I am hurt and scared, tossed by life,
Create in me a Brave Heart, O Lord.
When I am in the presence of beloved little ones,
Create in me a Playful Heart, O Lord.
When I am surgically dissecting the actions of others,
Create in me a Merciful Heart, O Lord.
When I am isolated by loneliness,
Create in me a Befriended Heart, O Lord.
When I am confused and entertain despair,
Create in me a Strong Heart, O Lord.
When I am anxious and poking the Tempter,
Create in me a Peaceful Heart, O Lord.
When I am exhausted and really need to stop,
Create in me a Sabbath Heart, O Lord.
When I am lost and have forgotten who I am,
Create in me YOUR Heart, O Lord.

We pray all of this, with gratitude and humility, saying together
the prayer Jesus taught: Our Father . . .

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

It is in giving that we receive. One of the ways we are able to demonstrate our love of God and neighbor is in the act of stewardship. Stewardship is not just financial. It is a commitment to care deeply for and tend intentionally to God's Creation. When we give of our financial gifts, as we are able, it is an expression

of our promise to care and tend to God's work in this world. So in our service we take a moment to give financially. But it's more than that too. It's also a moment to recognize and reaffirm your call to be a steward of God's work in the world. And so I invite you to do so now as you are able.

Dedication Prayer

With these gifts we do not insist on our own way, O God, but commit ourselves to follow a way that leads to love and life. May our stewardship be witness to our love for each other and the God who loves us all. 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 David Stair

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

The Gift of Love

If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

Special Music

All You Need Is Love by John Lennon and Paul McCartney

LCC Virtch Band

Hannah Hamrick, Tom Leatherman, and Audrey, Julie, and Lindy Warren, vocals

Tim Hampton, drums

Chris Burns and Shawn Warren, guitars

Ben Malkevitch, synth

Tom Leatherman, keys

Vince Huzicka, violin

Cathy Spicer, flute

Michael Komperda, Laura Rickard, and Audrey Warren, saxes

John Blasko and Noah Hamrick, trombones

Ben Malkevitch, editor

And Harold and Harmony!

Message

This gorgeous song (just performed) says “All You Need is Love.” They make it sound so simple. It’s all you need. If we can just get a handle on love, we’re golden. But it’s amazing when we really work to define love, and to apply love in its purest form, how difficult it is to do so and to do so consistently across all areas of our lives.

Together at our Annual Meeting we came up with these one word answers about what “Love is...”. These words are so beautiful and true, and yet still so challenging. “All you need is... all of this.”

Last year as we entered the season of Lent, I wrote a reflection in which I lifted the voice of the prophet Maya Angelou, may her memory be a blessing, who said that “love always liberates.” In an interview which, actually you can find on You Tube so I’ll put the link in the comments and in the weekly email, she says, “Oh I am grateful to have been loved, and to be loved now, and to be able to love because that liberates. Love liberates. It doesn’t just hold, that’s ego. Love liberates.”

Our well-known passage from 1st Corinthians certainly echoes Maya Angelou’s assertion, and I think it reflects many of the words in our Word Cloud too. It defines what love is and what love is not. Love is patient, kind, it does not boast, it isn’t arrogant or rude, irritable or resentful, it doesn’t insist on its own way. We often connect this passage to marriage, because it is so often read at weddings. And what a beautiful passage to read at a wedding, but it is certainly not restricted to romantic love. Paul’s words to the Corinthians work to define God’s love for us, and therefore they are an empowerment of how we should love in the world.

But again, we cannot simply define love.

These words in 1 Corinthians are so poetic, they flow so beautifully, and as we say them they sound so easy and gentle and simple. And yet if we stop to digest them, we realize how deeply challenging they are. Patience? I don't know one person who would say patience comes easily to them. Kindness is a muscle that works well when we exercise it but if we're hungry or angry or lonely or tired it collapses underneath us and we exclaim unsavory words to our neighbor. Arrogance and rudeness, irritability and resentment are sure to follow.

Love does not insist on its own way. Oof. Sit with that one for a while. When we are loving our children, our parents, our neighbors, our community, our partners, our friends, even when we are loving the God we worship, how often is there an undertow within us that is insisting on its own way? And how do we exercise the muscle that allows us to lean into the love that liberates rather than holds.

How do we learn to do love? How do we do this liberating love? It takes practice. Like kindness, love is a muscle. You have to work them out, strengthen them up. Maybe today you exercise your kindness muscles, and tomorrow you work on love. That's OK. Just don't skip love day.

OK, so you know you have to work on it. Got it, no problem. Just add it to your to-do list. Done! But wait – what is the exercise? What do you need to do? We have these lists and stories and books and inspirational quotes about what love is, but the thing that is really hard to define about love is: what does it look like in action? How do we liberate people with our love?

This is why we have God, right? God is liberating us every single day. We wake up in the morning, and God loves us so much that we are free, as free as the sunshine and the birds. Free to be who we truly are. Not who the world wants us to be. Maybe not even who we want to be, if we're being honest. But God's love frees

us from the unrealistic and unhealthy expectations and the constant demands on us, from work or school or family commitments. We don't have to do anything – nothing – to be worthy of God's love and grace. And that frees us to be who we are meant to be.

We need to remember this. I need to remember this. You need to remember this. God is always telling us, but we have to listen. Today, of course, is Valentine's Day. A day when we receive messages on little hearts that remind us that someone loves us. God is sending these messages every day, but if we took a moment to imagine God's valentines, what would they say? If God were imprinting these messages of love on little candy hearts, what would they look like? Here's some ideas:



You are enough. Just as you are. You are worthy of God's grace. There's nothing you need to do. There's no one you need to be. Just be you. Just do you. That's enough. You are worthy.



Do not be afraid. Peace be with you. It's OK to feel afraid sometimes, but with God's love, you don't have to live there. Fear doesn't get to tell us what to do. It doesn't define us. Love does. And when we live in love instead of fear, we are at peace.



Be kind. Do justice. Exercise those kindness muscles! Exercise those justice muscles, too! That's how we walk humbly in God's love. That's how we show love, and how we liberate others through our love.



You are blessed – as I always love to say – you are blessed, in order that you may be a blessing to the world. You are liberated so that you can liberate. And finally, God is love. I know we say that a lot, but take a moment to really take it in. God IS love. When you love someone with a liberating love, you are a conduit of God's grace and love.

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

St Valentine's Day Blessing:

There is but one love, Dear Ones, it is the Love of God.
This Big Love flows through all that is.
It moves from one being to another.
It flows from one era to another.
It continually seeks reunion with all beings.
It endlessly attends the wellbeing of everything.
May God's Redemptive Love,
made manifest in the person of Jesus Christ,
bless you and your loved ones today.
Peace be with you, Dear Ones! Amen.

Postlude

The King of Love My Shepherd Is by Dan Forrest
Ben Malkevitch, piano
(with LCC selfies)

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.

