

Lakewood Congregational Church

A Congregation of the United Church of Christ

Sunday, March 14, 2021



FOURTH SUNDAY
In Lent

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

Thank You, God by Paul Baloche and Don Moen
Ben Malkevitch, baritone and piano

Living Psalm,

Through Lent, rather than a Call to Worship, I'm going to share the weekly Psalm with you for reflection.

Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22

“Give thanks to the Lord because he is good,
because his faithful love lasts forever!”

That's what those who are redeemed by the Lord say,
the ones God redeemed from the power of their enemies,

the ones God gathered from various countries,
from east and west, north and south.

Some of the redeemed were fools because of their sinful ways.
They suffered because of their foolishness.

They had absolutely no appetite for food;
they had arrived at death's gates.

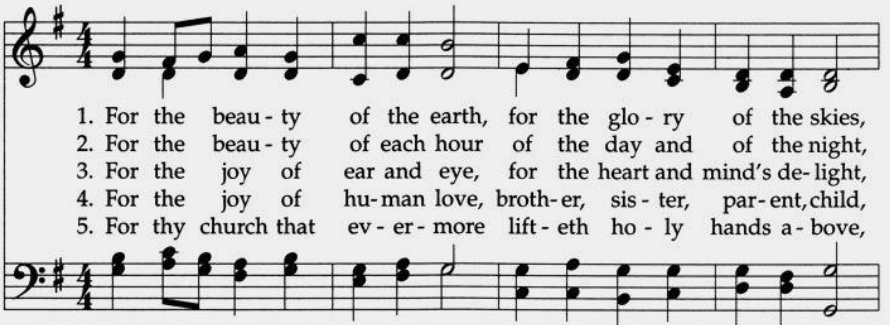
So they cried out to the Lord in their distress,
and God saved them from their desperate circumstances.

God gave the order and healed them;
he rescued them from their pit.

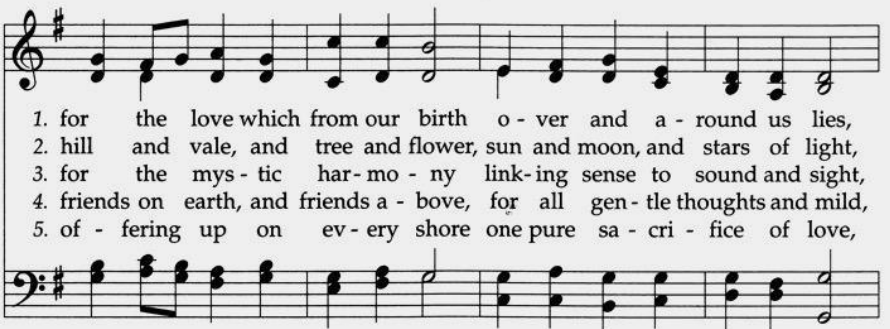
Let them thank the Lord for his faithful love
and his wondrous works for all people.

Let them offer thanksgiving sacrifices
and declare what God has done in songs of joy!

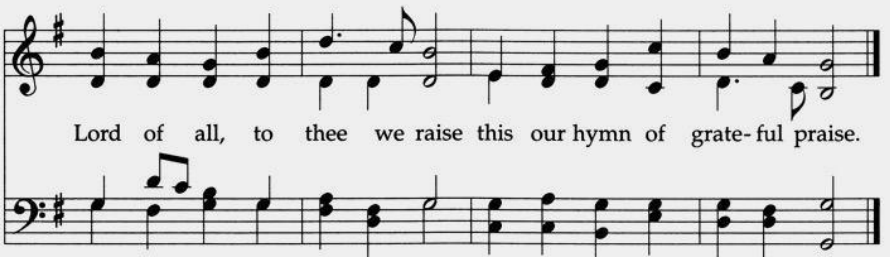
Hymn For the Beauty of the Earth



1. For the beau - ty of the earth, for the glo - ry of the skies,
2. For the beau - ty of each hour of the day and of the night,
3. For the joy of ear and eye, for the heart and mind's de - light,
4. For the joy of hu - man love, broth - er, sis - ter, par - ent, child,
5. For thy church that ev - er - more lift - eth ho - ly hands a - bove,



1. for the love which from our birth o - ver and a - round us lies,
2. hill and vale, and tree and flower, sun and moon, and stars of light,
3. for the mys - tic har - mo - ny link - ing sense to sound and sight,
4. friends on earth, and friends a - bove, for all gen - tle thoughts and mild,
5. of - fering up on ev - ery shore one pure sa - cri - fice of love,



Lord of all, to thee we raise this our hymn of grate - ful praise.

LCC Virtual Choir

Gwendolyn DeLaney and Victoria Peacock, sopranos;

Gwendolyn DeLaney, alto; Peter Hampton, Steve Hotchkiss,

Michael Komperda, Ben Liu, tenors; Noah Hamrick, Tim Hampton,

Robert Wenz, basses

Ben Malkevitch, organ

Pastoral Prayer

A PRAYER TO MARK ONE YEAR OF THE PANDEMIC, From the Salt Project

Good shepherd, thank you for walking with us through this valley of the shadow of death: through the suffering, the anxiety, the loneliness, the boredom, the longing for closeness and the longing for personal space, the confusion and fear, the impatience and hope, the good days and the bad.

Forgive us for our suspicions of each other, the ways this ordeal has made us more divided, as a country and a world. Help us bridge our differences and come together — even as we are physically distant.

Thank you for all the ways, large and small, that this ordeal has strengthened us as a community: the acts of kindness, the new ways of doing things, the support we've offered and received.

Forgive us for the inequities this pandemic has exposed. Kindle in our hearts a new commitment to justice as we build and rebuild our community together. Keep us ever mindful of those most in need.

We pray especially for those of us who have lost loved ones, lost jobs, lost hope.

Let us be good company, even from afar; good neighbors; and good friends.

We pray especially for those on the front lines of the pandemic, for all who are in harm's way.

Gentle God, we ask that you continue to keep watch with those who work, or watch, or weep this day. Walk with those whose bodies are holding memories of sickness, of trauma, of pain, of confusion, of chaos, of isolation.

Give your angels charge over those who still cannot sleep because of anxiety or grief.

Tend the sick, give rest to the weary, bless the dying, soothe the suffering, pity the afflicted, shield the joyous; all for your love's sake.

God of life and hope, lift our spirits as we dare to look ahead, dare to hope and dream about the new world to come. Strengthen our efforts, deepen our wisdom, so we might hasten that day.

And until that day, keep our eyes and hearts open to the signs of hope and life all around us.

For new ways to connect with each other, we give you thanks and praise!

For teachers and nurses and doctors and agricultural workers and grocery clerks and small business owners and frontline workers of all kinds, we give you thanks and praise!

For the beautiful hope of being together again in person one day, lifting our voices in song, passing the peace, sharing cups of coffee, being able to hug one another again — for that day that is surely coming, we give you thanks and praise!

For the ways in which our eyes have been opened by this ordeal, for the ways in which our hearts have been broken and put back together differently, softer and more attuned to the needs of the most vulnerable, we give you thanks and praise!

For all of these things and more, gentle God, we give you thanks and praise in the name of Jesus, our crucified and risen Jesus, Amen.

The Lord's Prayer, read by Parker Toms

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

Consider the steadfast love of God in every breath you breathe. May that steadfast love inspire you to give generously so that we may live into God's Reign of peace and compassion through the offerings of our own church.

Dedication Prayer

O Generous One, we give thanks to you for your steadfast love endures forever. May these gifts be used to feed the hunger and satisfy the thirst Of all those you love throughout your creation. 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 Paula Deal

Numbers 21:4-9

From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; but the people became impatient on the way. The people spoke against God and against Moses, 'Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we detest this miserable food.' Then the Lord sent poisonous serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many Israelites died. The people came to Moses and said, 'We have sinned by speaking against the Lord and against you; pray to the Lord to take away the serpents from us.' So Moses prayed for the people. And the Lord said to Moses, 'Make a poisonous serpent, and set it on a pole; and everyone who is bitten shall look at it and live.' So Moses made a serpent of bronze, and put it upon a pole; and whenever a serpent bit someone, that person would look at the serpent of bronze and live.

Message

- I. So, I want to show you a drawing my daughter did, and then I want to talk about it. She told me that it was okay to share this drawing and this story with you all. Here's the drawing. It's like...a bat, creature, monster?
 - A. Here's how it came into being. Sometime early in our parenting journey, my husband learned an idea...I don't know if he read it somewhere or came up with it himself...but the idea was that whenever our children were afraid of something, he would ask them to give it a name. If they were afraid of a monster in the closet or under the bed, we would tell them to give them a name. Talk to them. Tell them you'd like them to go away. We did it

occasionally with worries too...give your worry a name. Let the worry know that you're not happy she's living rent-free in your mind. Occasionally, we'd encourage them to draw a picture of the fear, but usually they didn't do that.

- B. The point is that when we can identify our fears and develop a relationship with them, they aren't so scary. Usually, the kids end up laughing, making some jokes with or about the monster in the closet, and feeling safe and comfortable with it.
 - C. So one morning Evelyn came to me and she said, I just drew such a cute thing, LOOK! And this is what she showed me. I mean, it's kinda cute, but mostly pretty creepy. I asked her what it was and she said, "Well, at night when I close my eyes, I see this really scary bat monster and it is hard for me to sleep. So I wanted to draw it so you could see what it looks like, but it accidentally came out so cute. It's kind of like the baby of the monster I see when I close my eyes.
 - D. Since then, she has asked to create a stuffed animal version of it. She loves this picture. And...I haven't heard anything new about the original fear. Instead I hear silly stories, or see drawings about this bat monster.
- II. The truth is, more often than not, what we're afraid of is the unknown. We're afraid of "what ifs"...we're afraid of "what will that look like?"...we're afraid of uncharted territory, whether it has to do with geography, or people, or life choices, or illness, or death. We're not interested in looking our fears in the eyes, because we'd rather just not deal with it. We'd rather shove it back in the closet and do what we can to avoid the uncharted territory that comes with it.

III. This is what's happening in this kind of strange text from Numbers has to do with a fear and a distrust of the unknown...It takes a few readings and time to sit with the text, but I'll explain.

- A. At this point in the Exile (the wilderness), the Israelites are really losing confidence in Moses's leadership. They're even beginning to distrust and express their anger towards God. I kind of mentioned this last week in my Ten Commandments study...the Israelites were freed from slavery in Egypt and are moving towards the Promised Land, but they sure thought the transition would happen more quickly.
- B. They are stuck with "Manna," which is nutritional and fills their bellies but it doesn't taste good. They complain about it a lot. They look back with rose-colored glasses at the food they had in Egypt. Even as slaves, they had fish and cucumber and melons. They had a schedule. They knew where they were going to bed and who they'd see the next day, and they knew that a meal would come to them. They were delivered from that place because even though they had some consistency and some predictability, they were not treated as human beings, they weren't respected as individuals. They had no dignity. So they were so grateful that Moses freed them and delivered them from that place. But here we are, at this point they have been in the wilderness of Kadesh for 40 years, and they don't seem to be making much progress. They are practically a generation removed from that time of Slavery, and they've passed down stories and know what that life looked like and the wilderness journey is still so unknown. They don't know when the

ending will come. And at this point, they're worried. They're afraid. they're just so angry.

- C. So...they express their anger towards God and towards Moses. And God feels that they have lost faith. God feels that they have broken the Covenant, that they are no longer trusting God and are now more interested in returning to slavery than continuing on in pursuit of a new life for generations to come.
- D. Now, God said God would never send a flood and wipe away the Earth again, but God never said God couldn't send a bunch of venomous snakes to teach them a lesson. I don't think this is God's shining moment either...I said that in the first week of Lent about the flood...and I can go on and on about the way biblical scholars look at this moment, but I'm going to stick to my initial point about looking fear in the eye instead..
- E. The people, still worried and afraid, turn to Moses in repentance. "We're really sorry. We messed up. Can you take the snakes away now?" so Moses checks in with God..."Hey...they're really sorry, they messed up, can you take the snakes away now?" And here's what happens. God says, "Nah, I can't take away the snakes but you know if you can make a snake out of metal or clay or wood or something, and stick it on a pole, then if they are bitten, they can go look at the snake, and they will live."
- F. This sounds ridiculous. But God is getting to know God's people. And at this point, God has learned that God's people need to learn how to look their obstacles and fears in the eye and work through them. God has learned that God can't provide easy remedies to God's people: "Fine, since you apologized, I'll take the snakes away" but instead,

"I appreciate and accept your apology, but our relationship can't continue to be like this. It's time for you to learn how to be resilient, courageous, and persevere in the face of suffering. The snakes will still be there, but I'll provide you with a means for healing in the midst of danger."

- G. God doesn't remove the sources of our suffering, but God makes the journey with us, providing what we most deeply need, if we just look in the right direction.
- IV. This is really important, actually, for us to understand our relationship with God.
 - A. A Covenant is a promise, but in the broad arc of the Biblical Narrative, it is the mutual, interconnected, interdependent relationship between God and God's people. It's this idea that God didn't just create the world and then let it float off into the universe to do its own thing detached and unsupported, but instead that God created the world and chose to hold the world in God's hands, to remain involved, attached, supportive. That is not to say that God is a puppet-master, controlling our every decision. It is also not to say that we get absolutely everything we ask God for. Instead, Covenant means that God knows us, imperfect as we are, and with committed Grace and Compassion, chose to put up with us.
 - B. On this journey in the unknown, in the wilderness, in the wandering, God is teaching God's people that bad things are going to happen, that struggles are going to take time, but that God will continue to be with us on the journey, pointing us towards healing and wholeness.
 - V. So what happens is that God presents us with a chance to look directly at the source of our pain and take responsibility for our action, and that a wondrous thing can

happen. That source of pain can become a source of healing.

- VI. Lent is a good time to take a look at the real sources of pain and death in our lives and relationships, and to ask God's help to be delivered from them. The grudges we carry and can't let go of, anger we've allowed to dominate our lives, the sin we have failed to own. We may point to, even treat, the symptoms very easily. We might figure out our treatment and how to fix them, but too often we aren't willing to look at the source of the pain.
- VII. So I give to you Evelyn's example, that we see when those who are bitten by the venomous snake look the snake in the eye, that it is not a source of death and overcoming us, but instead a source of healing and redemption.
- VIII. I invite you to consider what some of those moments and needs are in your life today. What fears can you look at straight in the eye, and how can you consider them a source of healing and redemption?

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

Beloved, let us rejoice: God so loves the world!

May God your Maker

send you back into the world (even if you stay right where you are) with creative energies refreshed.

May Christ the Light

illuminate your fearful moments.

And may the Holy Spirit of steadfast love
guide you until we worship together again.

This day and forevermore. Amen!

Postlude

Nun danket alle Gott ("Now Thank We All Our God")

by G. F. Kauffmann; Ben Malkevitch, organ

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.

