

# Lakewood Congregational Church

*A Congregation of the United Church of Christ*

Sunday, April 18, 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**

*Christ is Risen*

Jan Young, Handbells

Ben Malkevitch, Piano

## Call to Worship

One: Christ is Risen, and greets us with peace.

All: **The peace of Christ is among us, indeed.**

One: We are witnesses of God's glory and steadfast love.

All: **The transforming love of Christ is among us, indeed!**

One: Come, let us worship.

## Invocation

God of love and light, we come as witnesses of your glory and faithfulness, amazed to discover your transformative love.

God, we desire for you to abide within us, and for your grace to be revealed anew daily. Be with us and awaken within us the call to love one another, in the way it was made real through Jesus the Christ. Amen.

## Hymn *The Wonderful Words of Life*

LCC Virtual Choir

*Sing them over again to me,  
Wonderful words of life;  
Let me more of their beauty see,  
Wonderful words of life;  
Words of life and beauty  
Teach me faith and duty.*

*Refrain: Beautiful words, wonderful words,  
Wonderful words of life;  
Beautiful words, wonderful words,  
Wonderful words of life.*

*Christ, the blessed one, gives to all  
Wonderful words of life;  
Sinner, list to the loving call,  
Wonderful words of life;*

*All so freely given,  
Wooing us to heaven. [Refrain]*

*Sweetly echo the gospel call,  
Wonderful words of life;  
Offer pardon and peace to all,  
Wonderful words of life;  
Jesus, only Savior,  
Sanctify forever. [Refrain]*

## Invitation to the Offering

Let us give thanks for God's steadfast love by being witnesses to those who are hungry for food, encouragement, and relationship. Let us also witness to those who are poor in spirit, by allowing God's Spirit to loosen our grip on belongings and possessions, in order to awaken every troubled heart. And lastly, let us offer ourselves in gratitude and with generosity, as witnesses to God's goodness by our joyful giving.

## Dedication Prayer

God of abundant love, we offer a portion of our time, our spiritual gifts, and resources as a sign of our love for you and the world. O God, we give you our thanks for all that we have and ask a special blessing on these offerings. And God, we ask that our collective offering be an expression of healing, that brings hope to a hurting world. In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray. 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

Luke 24:36b-48

### Jesus Appears to His Disciples

While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, 'Peace be with you.' They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. He said to them, 'Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.' And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, 'Have you anything here to eat?' They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate in their presence.

Then he said to them, 'These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.' Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.'

### Message

- 1) Alright--good news for some of you and bad news for others. For the second time in a month, I'm going to talk about the Cavs. I come from a family that loves the Cleveland Cavs. The voices of the Cavs TV and radio announcers are the lullabies that bring me back to childhood comfort. But, like I talked about a few weeks

ago, we got very used to being fans of a team that just didn't win very often.

- a) So, when I tell you that LeBron James was drafted onto the Cavs just about 18 years ago at this point, you might need to pause your TV and take a few deep breaths, but...yeah...18 years. 2003.
- b) 18 years ago, when the Cleveland Cavaliers acquired LeBron James, something amazing happened to our city. The second that this 18-year-old boy from a poor family in Akron, Ohio recorded 25 points, 9 assists, 6 rebounds, and 4 steals and shot 60% from the floor in his very first NBA game, the city came alive in a new way, maybe you remember this--not because we were fair-weather fans, like a talked about a few weeks ago, but because we were just so excited about having a winning team. LeBron was breaking records, the Cavs were all over the national news, people were paying to go to the games, he was a role model and an idol and everything Cleveland ever needed.
- c) So, this is the part I'll never get over: our city did this crazy and, honestly, I think it's kind of funny... thing, because I was already into theology at this point. They put up an enormous banner in downtown Cleveland that had a black and white photo of LeBron James with his arms outstretched and his head looking towards the sky and just that absolute perfect photographic lighting on his muscles, and on it were the words, "We are all witnesses." I think it ended up becoming a larger Nike campaign, I'm not quite sure. But we are all witnesses.
- d) But...okay this is Theology humor here, so most of you probably don't think it's funny but stick with me...This is Acts 2:32: "God raised this Jesus to life, and of that all of us are witnesses." And it is Luke

24:48, that we just heard Darren read: “Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, ‘Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.’”

- e) Cleveland put a banner up downtown that spoke of Lebron as if he was the Risen Christ among us.
  - f) Then, we had him for seven seasons. That banner hung in downtown Cleveland for two years, followed by others like it. My brother and my mom both owned shirts that simply said, “Witness” on them. And they didn’t come across them easily—there were eBay bids involved. The name Lebron spiked in popularity among children born in Cleveland. And then when we thought they were almost to that long-awaited Cleveland championship—he left us. And this wasn’t just a normal trade. This felt like a total betrayal. He announced his leaving, not as the humble 18-year-old from Akron who they met 7 years earlier, but with a one-hour ESPN special entitled “The Decision.” We all turned it off after hearing those heart-wrenching words, “I’m going to take my talents down to South Beach.” And the following year, without him, the Cavs lost 26 games in a row.
- 2) We were all witnesses. We witnessed the success of our team, and the economic impact on our downtown. We witnessed a positive role model for our kids and collaborative teamwork in action. And then...we witnessed his departure.... And eventually his return again, and the Championship, and the Cavs parade, and his departure again. What does it mean to witness?

- a) Jesus says, “You are witnesses of these things,” after opening their minds to understand the scripture; after allowing them to touch his wounds and his skin and bones and see that he is indeed Risen among them.
- b) A witness is someone who has seen something, been a party to something, who has expertise about something...who shares their testimony when called upon. We hear of witnesses to accidents, to crimes, to major events. We also hear of witnesses to marriages, whose signature lets us know they saw it happen. Witnesses can be participants in an event, or someone who just happens to be walking by when it happens.
- c) But when we talk about witnessing, it’s not a word we use for just any everyday event that we see. Witnessing means we’ve seen something extraordinary. Sometimes it’s extraordinarily bad--like we’ve heard through witnesses this week in the trial of Derek Chauvin, who testified to the devastating and cruel death of George Floyd beneath the knee of the former officer. And sometimes witnessing is extraordinarily beautiful--like watching a Basketball team move with grace and cooperation around the court, like watching a baby emerge from her mother’s body, like witnessing a marriage ceremony, like witnessing the embrace of grandchild and grandparent after a long time of separation.
- d) Sometimes witnessing is extraordinarily bad--like witnessing the arrest, trial, and crucifixion of Jesus, and sometimes witnessing is extraordinarily beautiful--like listening to the Risen Christ explain the fulfillment of the scriptures and proclaim the forgiveness of God’s people.

3) On Easter Morning and again today, the Gospel writer makes a distinction between belief and understanding. On Easter, John wrote, “they saw into the tomb and believed, but did not yet understand.” and here, Luke explains that along some spectrum of belief and disbelief they touch Christ’s wounds and watch him eat, but it wasn’t until after all of that, that the Risen Christ opened their minds, and they understood.

a) To believe means to accept something as true, even if you don’t have absolute certainty about it but to understand is to be aware of the power of something. To grasp what it is to make it powerful.

b) The Power of being witnesses to the Resurrection lies in the promise that God came to us in a form we could understand... not just in a form we could accept as true, but in a form we could be aware of the meaning of. In human form, the Divine Christ stands beside us knowing what it is like to touch, taste, see, smell, and hear; knowing what it is to experience deep comfort and companionship, as well as trauma and chaos. He stands among us knowing even what it is to die. So, Jesus says to the Disciples, “Let me tell you one more time, in a way that you can understand it...in a way that has meaning and makes sense.”

c) Writer and Theologian Debie Thomas, writes “The Jesus of Easter is the Jesus of the Incarnation. The Jesus who grows in a womb, enters the world through a birth canal, sleeps in a feeding trough, and nurses at Mary’s breast. The Jesus who scrapes his knees, roughhouses with his playmates, loses his parents during Passover, and goes through puberty in the backwaters of Nazareth. The Jesus who soaks in the waters of baptism, hungers for bread in the Judean wilderness, weeps at his friend’s grave,

flings a whip around the temple, appreciates scented oils on his feet and head, sweats blood in the garden of Gethsemane, and suffers asphyxiation on a Roman cross. “It is I myself,” Jesus tells his wonderstruck disciples as they struggle to reorder all that they know about life and death, souls and bodies, in the aftermath of his astonishing appearance. It is I myself. Me. The one you know. The one you love. The one you trust. Touch me and see.”

4) It is one thing to witness to something we believe, to tell something to be people we believe to be true, but it is another thing entirely to witness to something we understand. So here, the Risen Christ calls his Disciples, “witnesses.” “You have seen and even understood something extraordinary.” They have seen his risen body, not a ghost, not a spirit moving among them, but a resurrected person with wounds in his hands and who asks, “do you have anything here I can eat?” They have seen him engage in a meal, they have touched his skin, and they have heard him proclaim the fulfillment of scripture back through Moses and they don’t just accept it as true, they don’t just believe it as a possibility but they are aware of the meaning of it all. And Jesus sends them out to testify to what they have seen.

a) Today, we are not able to witness in quite the same way. We cannot reach out and touch Christ’s wounds and watch him chew on that broiled fish. But still, we are called, even in our stumbling, not only towards belief, but towards understanding. We understand by witnessing the work of Christ at work in the world. We understand by seeing...by witnessing to God’s Grace and Love in our encounters, in our stories, in our dreams, in our

prayers, and in our sharing, and by testifying that we've seen it.

- b) So I guess my question today is, how have you witnessed the resurrection in your life? How have you seen the risen Christ among you? What are you a witness of?
- c) We witness, understand, and experience the Risen Christ today and every day in one another: in the support that is offered through our grief or illness, through the Grace we offer one another, through the beauty of this Earth and through human creativity and laughter and growth. To the time we spend with children and with our elderly folks. We witness the Risen Christ when events in our weekly lives make us feel weak, but the presence of the Holy Spirit, especially made known through one another, strengthens us and prepares us to go about our work in the world. And when we understand the work of Christ among us, we sure are witnesses of something truly special—not an athlete or any flawed human being, although sometimes we witness the glory of the Risen Christ in other flawed human beings but especially, we are witnesses of something truly special in a real true God who shines through us despite our flaws, who will never, ever let us down.
- d) And so, with this, we thank God for God's presence and for making God's self-known to us through the Risen Christ and we pray we might be witnesses to of these extraordinary things.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

## **Benediction**

Let us go forth having laid down our burdens.

Let us go forth rich in spirit,  
knowing God has a plan for our lives.

And, let us go forth as witnesses to God's hope  
of justice, peace, grace, and love.

Believing fully that Christ is among all humanity,  
now and always. Amen.

## **Postlude**

*Allemande from French Suite No. 5 in g, J.S. Bach*

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](http://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.*

