

# Lakewood Congregational Church

*A Congregation of the United Church of Christ*

Sunday, May 16, 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

*Come to Me* by Christopher Grundy  
Maic D'Agostino, voice and guitar

## Call to Worship

Day by day, God leads us:

**To the deep, deep pools of peace,  
To the green, lush lawns of grace.**

Day by day, Jesus calls us:

**To pour out ourselves in service,  
To anoint the stranger with hope.**

Day by day, The Holy Spirit shows us:

**The community we could be,  
The joyful family we are inspired to become.**

## Invocation

Life-giving God, your love and light guides us on the path of courage, compassion, generosity, and grace. Lead us we seek to follow your transformative love that turns sorrow into joy, and despair into hope. O God, help us embrace your guiding love that calls us to live as your faithful witnesses, who reflect your grace and redemptive love. Open hearts to receive your gracious love, and strengthen us to carry the Good News of your healing power found in the light, love and life of Jesus the Christ. Amen.

## Hymn Wash, O God, Your Sons and Daughters

LCC Virtual Choir: Victoria Peacock, soprano; Gwendolyn DeLaney, alto; Steve Hotchkiss, Michael Komperda, Ben Liu, tenors; Tim Hampton, Noah Hamrick, Robert Wenz, basses; Ben Malkevitch, organ

## Sacrament of Holy Baptism

Teegan Myra Barlow

Kendall Olivia Barlow

*A word from the Poet Maic D'Agostino:*

First of all, baby, you were born.

You were born on the cedar desk of God, under a brass lamp.

You are a poem that God wrote one sleepless night.

“In your blood and soul,” God wrote,

“Are the thunderings of a thousand raining voices

And the whisper of a window open

To the spraying sea.”

Then, you were born. You burst

And sank upon the earth, inexorable as snow,

Wide-eyed but ready. We took you in our tiny hands,

Afraid that we would break you with the fervor of our love.

You took the world in your tiny hands and shook it.

Now, you will be born.

You will join our choir of secret waterfalls and hand-drawn wells,  
Of broken creeks and unstained springs,  
And of an ocean that connects every adventure to another.  
You will become water  
And roar through every canyon,  
Dancing in the trees' mirror and singing in the night.

For God's plan is not to dam but to break the dam,  
So you will run wild through the world,  
Where there will be no stopping you,  
Bearing the truth of God in each drop of your being,  
Bearing the grace of making wrong turns,  
And bearing the power of love  
To every rock and salamander,  
To every water strider and cattail,  
To every minnow and bit of moss.

Jesus loved the muddy, marshy, leechy Jordan.  
Jesus loved the mosquitoes that swarmed in Galilee.  
Jesus loved the forgettable and the foul,  
The factious and the forlorn.  
You are the word you are,  
The word that God wrote you into being,  
The word that only you can speak.

As you are baptized into a word of fire and rain,  
Speak your word, the word God made you.  
Speak it babbling like a brook,  
Speak it silent like a pool,  
Speak it quenching like a fountain,  
Speak it home like an evening bay.

The sacrament of baptism is an outward and visible sign of the grace of God. Inasmuch as the promise of the gospel is not only to us but also to our children, baptism with water and the Holy Spirit is the mark of their acceptance into the care of Christ's church, the sign and seal of their

participation in God's forgiveness, and the beginning of their growth into full Christian faith and discipleship. God already chose you, Kendall and Teegan, but today we witness and celebrate that choice. We celebrate the power of grace. In baptism, God reminds us we were born out of the first waters into this everlasting power. For that, Church, say, "Thanks be to God!"

**ALL: Thanks be to God!**

**Pastor:** Jesus himself was baptized in a river that was murky and unpredictable. From that point on, his mission was clear: Free the oppressed. Heal the sick. Release the prisoner. Feed the hungry. Sate the thirsty. Dethrone the powerful. Overturn the tables of the exploitative. Expose hypocrisy and lies. Light the world on fire with truth. This is the gospel. And for that, Church, say, "Thanks be to God!"

**ALL: Thanks be to God!**

**Pastor:** The promise of the gospel, and the commitment to fulfill it, is not only for us but for our children. Jesus, a poor refugee, a carpenter's child, the baby of an unmarried teenager, shook the very foundations of the earth. This sacrament is a symbol of the power that resides in each one of us to shake the world. Baptism is a covenant between God and the church and all adherents to Jesus' world-shaking, earth-shattering Way. And for that, once again, we say, "Thanks be to God!"

**ALL: Thanks be to God!**

**For Kendall:**

**Pastor:** Do you desire to have your child baptized into the faith and family of Jesus Christ? If so please say: We do...

**Parents:** We do...

**Pastor:** Will you encourage her to renounce the powers of greed, hatred, selfishness and oppression, receiving new freedom in the life of Jesus? If so please respond: We do...

**Parents:** We do.

**Pastor:** Do you promise, by the grace of God, to show love and justice and to witness to the work and word of Jesus Christ as best as you are able? If so, please respond: We do...

**Parents:** We do.

**Pastor:** Do you promise, according to the grace given you, to grow with Kendall in the Christian faith and help to further the mission of Jesus Christ in the world? If so please respond: We do....

**Parents:** We do.

**For Teegan:**

**Pastor:** Teegan, do you desire to be baptized into the faith and family of Jesus Christ?

**Candidate:** I do.

**Pastor:** Do you renounce the powers of greed, selfishness, and oppression, receiving new freedom in the life of Jesus?

**Candidate:** I do.

**Pastor:** Do you promise, by the grace of God, to be Christ's disciple, to show love and justice and to witness to the work and word of Jesus Christ as best as you are able?

**Candidate:** I promise, with the help of God.

**Pastor:** Do you promise, according to the grace given you, to grow in the Christian faith and to be a faithful member of the church of Jesus Christ, celebrating Christ's presence and furthering Christ's mission in all the world?

**Candidate:** I promise, with the help of God.

**Congregational Assent**

**Pastor:** Beloved church, we are called to share God's unquenchable love with all the nations and to awaken in them the power of grace we all carry within us. Do you, who witness and celebrate this sacrament of baptism, promise your love, support, and care to the one about to be baptized as she lives and grows in this community? If so, say, "We promise our love, support, and care."

**ALL: We promise our love, support, and care.**

## **Affirmation of Faith**

**Pastor:** Let us join together in reaffirming our baptismal promises to follow the Way by answering, "I do."

**Pastor:** Do you believe in God?

**ALL:** I believe in God.

**Pastor:** Do you believe in Jesus Christ?

**ALL:** I believe in Jesus Christ.

**Pastor:** Do you believe in the Holy Spirit?

**ALL:** I believe in the Holy Spirit.

**Prayer:** We thank you, God, for the gift of creation called forth by your saving Word. Before the world had shape and form, your Spirit moved over the waters.

Out of the waters of the deep, you formed the firmament and brought forth the earth to sustain all life. In the time of Noah, you washed the earth with the waters of the flood, and your ark of salvation bore a new beginning. In the time of Moses, your people Israel passed through the Red Sea waters from slavery to freedom and crossed the flowing Jordan to enter the promised land. In the fullness of time, you sent Jesus Christ, who was nurtured in the water of Mary's womb.

Jesus was baptized by John in the water of the Jordan, became living water to a woman at the Samaritan well, washed the feet of the disciples, and sent them forth to baptize all the nations by water and the Holy Spirit.

**Pastor:** Bless by your Holy Spirit, gracious God, this water. By your Holy Spirit save those who confess the name of Jesus Christ that sin may have no power over them. Create new life in *the ones* baptized this day that *they* may rise in Christ. Glory to you, eternal God, the one who was, and is, and shall always be, world without end. Amen.

**Pastor:** By what name shall this child be called?

Kendall, I baptize you, born and born and born again, in the name of the God who Creates, the name of Jesus who leads the Way, and the name of the Spirit which enkindles our hearts.

Grace always be tight in your fist, Kendall, child of God, disciple of Jesus, member of the church.

Church, greet your newest sister in Christ with joy.

**Pastor:** Now, by what name are you called?

Teegan, I baptize you, born and born and born again, in the name of the God who Creates, the name of Jesus who leads the Way, and the name of the Spirit which enkindles our hearts.

Grace always be tight in your fist, Teegan, child of God, disciple of Jesus, member of the church.

Church, greet your newest sister in Christ with joy.

Let us Pray: We give you thanks, O Holy One, mother and father of all the faithful, for this your child and for the grace acknowledged here today in water and the Holy Spirit. Embrace us all as sons and daughters in the one household of your love. Grant us grace to receive, nurture, and befriend this new member of the body of Christ. Give to the newly baptized: Strength for life's journey, courage in time of suffering, the joy of faith, the freedom of love, and the hope of new life; through Jesus Christ who makes us one. Amen.

We pray all of this in the name of your son, Jesus, who taught us to pray in this way.

## **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**

## Dedication Prayer

Dear God, We offer our generous gifts as a sign of our gratitude for creating us to care for one another. We pray your blessings upon these gifts, and hope they serve as our love for you and the world. Redeeming God, we ask that these gracious offerings be a witness your healing and faithful love in order to bring 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 Paula Deal

### Acts 1:1-11

In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. “This,” he said, “is what you have heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?” He replied, “It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going and they were gazing up toward

heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

## Message

- I. Today we’re celebrating the Ascension, and also the word “Called,” for the 5th letter in the word Unlock. Rachel and I have been using this word for the past few weeks as a way of looking at the literal unlocking of our church, as we begin to ease back into in-person activities, but also to think of the ways in which we’re called to open our hearts and minds, to unlock and let loose into the world. Often, the Ascension falls on a weekday, 40 days after Easter. And for whatever reason, that means that we don’t end up talking about it all that much.
- II. But it’s important that we talk about this part of the story-- because we talk about and know the course of Holy Week: Jesus was betrayed, crucified, died, and was buried, and on Sunday he rose again and was back among the living, speaking about the Kingdom of God by “Many convincing proofs” as today’s text says. But that did not last forever. He did not remain among the living in physical form. Instead, after 40 days he was lifted up to God the Creator, in love and in power.
  - A. What exactly this means is filled with centuries of interpretations that we won’t get into today, but what we do need to be aware of is that following the ascension, there is not simply a return to the way things were before. The world has changed, because the world has known the presence of God incarnate, and because God has known what it is to live in human flesh.
- III. And the world has changed because of this response Jesus’ offers his followers before he ascends: “You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”
  - A. Because Jesus ascended, we became his witnesses. We had to learn to look into each other’s faces and connect each other’s hearts to know what to do. We could no longer stand as a group of followers looking to Jesus to tell us what to do and how to live.

Instead, we had to turn to each other, and to our inner-knowing, and to ask one another in community, “as a witness of Jesus, what is the next right thing?”

B. Because Jesus ascended, it is on us to translate how to live as followers of Christ, and to listen attentively to the way in which the Spirit is calling us to be witnesses of God’s love and justice in the world.

I. Often, before a Baptism I quote the poet Kahlil Gibran who says, “Your children are not your children. They are the sons and daughters of Life’s longing for itself. They come through you but not from you, And though they are with you yet they belong not to you.”

a. As a parent this poem is just the dose of humility we need most days. Those days when we think that if we just make every single right choice, our children will turn out exactly the way we want them to, we need that reminder that they come through us but not from us. We guide our children into the world and we are their keepers, but we did not create them and we do not own them. We don’t get to program them to our liking, assign them interests and hobbies, or choose the paths of their lives for them. We can only help to day in and day out hammer home the constant reminder of who they are, whose they are, and that the Power of the Holy Spirit is upon them.

II. Baptism is very much a proclamation of our identity. It is, in our tradition, not an abracadabra act, but an outward sign of an inward covenant that we already know before a child breathes her first breath— that we belong to God and we belong to each other in the Body of Christ and the human community. And it is out of those deep, unconditional promises of rootedness and belonging, that our identity is formed.

III. In this passage from Acts, we’re invited to move from passive spectators of Christ’s healing love to active witnesses and engaged Disciples. When the Disciples want to lean on Jesus’ power to do all the work, Jesus says to them that through the Holy Spirit they will receive the power that transforms them and calls them forward to be the hands and feet of God in the world. I find comfort in how much Jesus trusts his followers as he prepares to leave. We may see

ourselves as unable to fulfill Christ’s vision, but Jesus sees us as capable of loving, healing, and bringing justice and peace to all the ends of the earth.

IV. We cannot forget this trust that has been placed on us. We cannot forget who and whose we are. When we do, we will do all kinds of things in vain to figure it out. We will flail our arms frantically looking for a sense of belonging, looking for a place to bury our feet in rootedness, and what we find is sinking sand, fragile branches, and a cancerous sense of fear.

A. So many of the messages we experience day in and day out are there to suggest we are inadequate, that we are not sufficient to be called, that we need something to make us good enough, that we have to look the right way and succeed in the right ways if we want to be loved. So many headlines suggest that there are not enough resources to go around. And so many politicians and theologians and leaders - of all parties and persuasions- contend that we have a great deal to fear. But in remembering and embracing our baptism, in looking back to our roots and to the trust Jesus gave to his Disciples at the moment of his Ascension, we have the opportunity to claim the same baptismal promise that empowered Jesus into his ministry: “this is my child, my beloved, in whom I am well pleased.” God says that we are so totally enough, that our belovedness cannot be taken away, that we are called and wanted by God, and that we need not live in fear and constant seeking.

As we emerge from this pandemic, which none of us could have ever prepared for...

from authentically connecting with our purpose and identity, remaining unstained by the world, not allowing the world to claim us and call us anything that we are not, not allowing the world to tell us that we aren’t enough, or that we have lost our covenant because of something we said or did. And it is out of that sense of purpose and identity that we extend our arms to the needs of others— to the lost, the last, the least, the marginalized and the oppressed, to the vulnerable and those in need. It is our sense of purpose and identity that our roots become too strong for fear, and that we can’t help but grow our branches. To

proclaim to every single weird individual in this world— every single one of you, every single person we encounter, and every one of the seven billion people in this world that they were loved into being, that they are unconditionally a part of our human connectedness, and we belong to each other, sisters and brothers in Jesus Christ, in humanity, and in creation. We claim all of that here, and for those inevitable moments when we try to put our roots back into the sinking sand, day in and day out, the opportunity arises to claim it again. Thanks be to God.

### **Benediction**

Let us go forth in the world, giving thanks that we have come. Let us go forth renewed in spirit, knowing that we belong to God. And, let us go forth as witnesses, carrying the light of Jesus Christ. Amen.

### **Postlude**

*On Jordan's Banks the Baptist's Cry*, arr. Cathay Moglebust  
Jan Young, handbells; Ben Malkevitch, piano

### **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.*