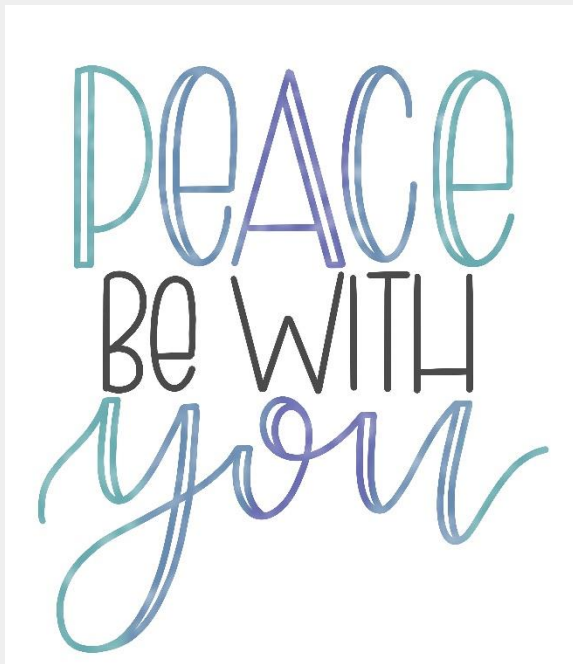


Lakewood Congregational Church

A Congregation of the United Church of Christ

Sunday, May 2, 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.

Information on outdoor worship experiences: we will be offering outdoor worship every Sunday after Pentecost Sunday.

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 the Table by Ben Malkevitch
Ben Malkevitch, baritone and piano

Call to Worship

One: As we gather, may we open our hearts to receive newness of life.

All: **We come with hope for renewal.**

One: In our time of worship, may we be inspired by God's wisdom.

All: **We come seeking to learn and to draw closer to God.**

One: Come, let us worship, as the beloved children of God.

Hymn *O God, Unseen Yet Ever Near*

*O God, unseen yet ever near,
reveal thy presence now;
while we, in love that hath no fear,
Before they glory bow.*

*Here may thy faithful people know
the blessings of thy love,
the streams that through the desert flow,
the manna from above.*

*A while beside the found we stay
And eat this bread of thine;
then go rejoicing, on our way,
renewed with strength divine.*

LCC Virtual Choir

Victoria Peacock, soprano; Gwendolyn DeLaney, alto;

Steve Hotchkiss and Michael Komperda, tenors;

Tim Hampton, Noah Hamrick, and Robert Wenz, basses

Ben Malkevitch, organ

Pastoral Prayer

Gracious and Abundant God,

We woke up this morning and breathed your beautiful fresh air, and for that alone we praise you. Even in our moments of discouragement, and loneliness, and frustration, especially living in this liminal time, this uncertainty, you provide us with lives full of abundance, if we just look around for it. You set before us the trees, and the flowers, and birds full of life, and you breathe your wind through them that we may be aware of your presence here among us.

We praise you for the gift of community that you've given us through the church. That you've given that community the strength to thrive even in this difficult time. We rejoice in the chance to connect with people who love us and care for us regardless of how good or bad our weeks were. Regardless of who we are and what we have done. We rejoice in the connections and love for each other. We praise you for bringing each of us here, to this moment, to settle ourselves to worship you to be refreshed, comforted, and challenged, so that we may go out into the world in whatever way is right for us so far. Sharing your Good News, empowered to do your work.

We are so aware that there are times and places when a life of abundance is hard to see. We know that there are countries and houses and individuals divided and at war. We know that our siblings are hungry and thirsty and in need of hope. We know that the world is full of disease and addiction and mental and physical pain. We pray, especially for India, and for those other places where a surge of Covid-19, in those places where the light is not yet even visible at the end of the tunnel. In these times and places, O God, make your presence known. Send upon us your bountiful love and the freedom of life that you promise. Heal us and feed us that we may continue to do your work in the world.

And make us Apostles. Make our love for you contagious – uncontainable and on the loose. And help us to provide an encounter with your son, Jesus, to each person we talk to. We remember that he 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

Let our offering lift up one another in God's love that abides in times of hopelessness, brokenness and failure.

Let our offering be a thanksgiving of God's love that abides within us in times of hopefulness, forgiveness, unity, and peace.

And let us accept God's invitation to be ever-present in times of deep despair, and in times of great joy. Now, let us offer ourselves in gratitude and with generosity for the abiding goodness of God.

Dedication Prayer

Generous God, we offer you the fruits of our time, talents and resources in celebration of all that we have been given. Loving God, we give you thanks for all that we have and ask a special blessing on that which we have given back to help meet the needs of your beloved community. May the gifts nourish and strengthen the community to grow spiritually, emotionally, and physically. In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

Scripture Reading, read by Claire Stair

1 John 4:7-21

God Is Love

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does

not love does not know God, for God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.

By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Saviour of the world. God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. So we have known and believe the love that God has for us.

God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgement, because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. We love because he first loved us. Those who say, 'I love God', and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.

Message

Our faith begins and ends with God's love. We overcomplicate that all the time by expanding on the intricacies of love, overanalyzing and overthinking, and obsessing about what is not love. The clanging gongs and clashing cymbals we know from 1 Corinthians 13-- the noises that surround us in the world-- create barriers and obstacles and we lose touch with it. And we forget

how simple it really is. But our faith begins and ends with God's love...it's quite simple. God is love and love is God. It's a basic truth as integral as the air we breathe and the sun that shines. We have each seen and felt God's love at the core of our soul and we know what that love feels like in us, we know what it looks like when it is lifted up relationally in our lives together. We also know what it feels like when there are barriers in the way of love.

Rev. M. Barclay writes:

“Without love, it is all just clanging cymbals in our ears, obscuring the wisdom only birthed in silence. It makes it so hard to perceive the voice of God around us - within us. Without love, the feelings within us are silenced. Without love, we move too quickly. We tend to the surface. We miss the roots. Our dreaming becomes narrow and shallow. Without love, we struggle to speak honestly of our own longings. We don't believe anymore that we deserve to be loved better by society - to have more time, more peace, less surveillance, less pressure, more justice. We struggle to take the pleas of our neighbors seriously and to recognize the flesh in front of us as Sacred, deserving to be loved for love's sake...”

1 John 4 makes it all so abundantly clear. *Love is from God. If we love one another, God lives in us, and God's love is perfected in us. Our faith begins and ends with love.*

Since I began my ministry at LCC, we have not had a regular formal practice of “Passing the Peace” during worship. We've done it a couple times, but not often. I know LCC has done it on and off through the decades, depending on the pastor and the time of the year. It's a liturgical practice I love and hate...It is so easy to forget the meaning and make it into a regular morning greeting, and it becomes easy to exclude people, or create anxiety for folks who like to keep to themselves. But at its core, this moment to look into the eyes of your neighbor, to see the face of Christ in them, to wish them peace and to recognize their

capacity for forgiveness and to be forgiven...it is a really beautiful practice. For me it's a way of symbolizing the way that *if we love one another, God lives in us, and God's love is perfected in us*

- At my previous church, this was a regular weekly practice. There were weeks when I really yearned for it, especially on Sundays when the morning in my house had been complete chaos...when it seemed that every word I spoke had been one of argumentative impatience...when I scoffed at my spouse and yelled at my children...when I put myself down for the quality of my sermon or the way my hair was behaving, or questioned my ability to serve my church well...When I dwelled in the frustration of how long it took us to get out the door.
- And I would sit through the prelude and crave this precious moment when we spend time together shaking one another's hands and looking one another in the eye and saying, “Peace be with you.” I love to shake the hands of each of my family members, each one of whom I've undoubtedly lost my patience within the last couple of hours, or who I've resented for reasons beyond their control, and say, “May the peace of Christ be with you.” I love to shake the hands of people who have amazed me and people who have frustrated me, those who have let me down and those whom I have let down...and say “Peace be with you.” And it's like this big, clean, slate. It's like starting over. It's this promise that even though we'll mess up again, for right now we have come to that humble place, of forgiveness, of grace, of understanding, where we will together as one community experience God's glory through one another's humanity.

Molly Phinney-Baskett is a UCC pastor and writer...she spoke here in our sanctuary a couple years ago...whose book, *Standing Naked Before God*, is one I go back to over and over again. She speaks of being open with one another about our flaws and shortcomings, and the healing that comes from telling the full story, even when it doesn't make us look great. She wrote once, about a sort of a

tongue-in-cheek story of redemption and God's love in and through us. She wrote:

- “You guys. I was just on a chat with a Verizon wireless rep that may have changed my fundamentally belligerent posture toward customer service reps forever. We chatted about how my son broke his phone and can get a new one if he gets good grades but will have to suffer with a flip phone for now. She told me about her nephew who is always losing his phones. It was a human moment. I may have been redeemed here, never to sin in this way again.”
- She's being somewhat silly as she talks about something so many of us dread, which is to have a conversation with customer service representatives, but she's also pointing out one of the very necessary moments in which we realize that each and every person we encounter is a human being, with feelings, with a story, who was made in the image of God. We recognize that even those people we dread calling have the capacity to love and be loved in return.

So many different cultures have ways of acknowledging and pulling us into this reminder of our shared humanity...each of the world's major religions and cultures have a way of acknowledging that we are connected, and that we are each so desperately in need of love and to be loved in return.

- Among the Hindu and Indian Diaspora, Namaste: The Divine in me honors the Divine in you
- In Southern Africa, Ubuntu: I am because you are...my humanity is bound together with your humanity
- In Middle Eastern and Islamic cultures: Salaam Alaikum: Peace be upon you
- In Christian cultures and in our understanding: Peace be with you
- And here in today's passage from 1 John, we experience another Christian reminder of this deeply interconnected and

foundational love of each of our siblings: *We love because God first loved us. Those who say, 'I love God', and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.*

- The writer says, “You love each person even in the same way as you have loved me. The love with which you have loved me will also reside in them from the beginning of this story until the end.
- And when we see that reminder, that we are made one, that we are brought together, through the unconditional love that is given to us by God, it becomes easier to be connected to one another as humans.

The struggle here comes with the human reality that there are people in our lives who are really, really desperately difficult to love.

The basic premise of 1 John suggests otherwise. If we love others as God has loved us, there are no boundaries. God's love, made visible through the words and actions of Jesus, is the source for the love we share with others. Jesus ignored the limits of love as the world knew it. He ate and talked with people whom the religious leaders had rejected as heretics, as sinful, as filthy and despicable. He touched people who were considered untouchable and welcomed people whom everyone else had caste aside. His harshest words were reserved not for the people who had messed up or lived in unsavory ways, but for the people who loved pride and power more than people. Still, even as he offered harsh words and accountability to the powerful, he loved them.

Jesus shows us that God's love does not have boundaries. It is for every single human being.

Thanks be to God, the promise of 1 John is that love doesn't have to and actually can never originate from within us. It is not our human, limited love that we share with God's beloved. It is about unlocking ourselves so that God's love can come into us, and through us, so that God can love others through us.

When we love one another, we have unlocked a doorway for God to love the world. When God's unimaginable, limitless love comes through our doorways, we become the real presence of God in the world.

Beloved, we are people of the resurrection. And resurrection means no longer keeping the doors locked, no longer keeping the stone in front to the tomb. Resurrection means unlocking ourselves towards a place of oneness, even if every single moment calls for another prayer of reconciliation, another assurance of pardon, another time of passing the peace and starting over.

- Oneness does not mean being excited to see each and every person. It doesn't mean liking everyone. It means coming to a humble place to say that God dwells within me in the very same way that God dwells within you. You are a person made in the image of God and you are deserving of my human capacity for love, even if I don't like you.
- And I think that the Kingdom of God comes into this world when we are not dwelling in brokenness but instead we are living in oneness. When we are not dwelling in hatred but instead we are living in shared humanity. When we are able to look each person in the eye and say, Peace be with you.
- It's not easy, and it is not an overnight shift, but it is what we are called to and we are in this journey together.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Celebration of Holy Communion

Invitation

For Holy Communion this morning,
we sanctify our time and many tables
for a sacrament never confined
to sanctuaries or precious surfaces —
carved with “Do this in Remembrance of Me,”
but always following
wherever one of God precious children,
like a sheep astray,
is lost or needs a guiding.

Christ is our shepherd.
Christ leads us not around,
but through the valley of the shadow —
and turns to us, as Jesus did when he came through
the walls of a locked room
in the afternoon of resurrection,
said, “Peace be with you,”
and then asked if they had anything
to give him to eat.

Give the gentle Shepherd who is the Risen Christ
your bread, your cup and your heart.

Prayer of Consecration

Leader: We have bread and cup and heart. Our church
community is dispersed in distance but we are one in
Christ. In your many kitchens, and living rooms, rest your
hands lightly upon these elements which we set aside
today to be a sacrament. Let us ask God's blessing upon
them and upon us and upon those who are in our prayers
this morning.

Unison: Gentle Host, you prepare a table before us in this liminal moment. You anoint our hearts, bless our bread and our cups overflow. Surely we find both the goodness of community and mercy to those most vulnerable. Now and all the days of our lives we claim that this house – these many houses where we dwell and also our precious church building, are, indeed, the house of God.

Send your Spirit of life and love, power and blessing upon us so that this Bread may be broken and gathered in love and this Cup poured out to give hope to all. Risen Christ, live in us, that we may live in you. Breathe in us, that we may breathe in you. Amen.

Words of Remembering

Leader: We remember the sharing of bread in many places – wilderness manna, tents and caves of shepherds, Abigail’s saddle bags, the lunch of a small boy, the fish of the disciples and the loaf of Emmaus. And we remember that Paul the apostle wrote letters to congregations throughout places we now call Greece, Turkey and Macedonia, and they were the first “remote” worship resources, including these Communion words sent to the church at Corinth:

For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” For as often as you eat this bread

and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

Sharing of the Elements

Leader: Let us in our many places receive the gift of God, the Bread of Heaven.

Unison: We are one in Christ in the bread we share.

Leader: Let us in our many places receive the gift of God, the Cup of Blessing.

Unison: We are one in Christ in the cup we share.

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Leader: Let us pray in thanksgiving for this meal of grace, rejoicing that, in the holy dispersion of virtual worship, we claim the risen Christ’s love is not limited by buildings made with human hands, nor contained in human ceremonies, and celebrating the God’s shepherding that carries us into the unknown, to listen and follow, to lead and be led, to feed and be fed. Thanks be to God, Amen.

Benediction

Beloved, go forth from this place unlocking your hearts to understanding and nurture and love, knowing that God’s love will flow through you and out into the world even to yourself. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, one God, mother of us all.

Postlude

The Serene Rohr Flute by Colin Mawby
Ben Malkevitch, organ

Note: The *Rohrflöte* featured in this piece is a rank of organ pipes fashioned in a way as to mimic the sound of the flute. These pipes are a bit gentler in tone than the main diapason sound we often associate with the organ. -BHM

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.*

