

Lakewood Congregational Church

A Congregation of the United Church of Christ

Sunday, May 9, 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

Gott im Frühlinge (God in Spring) by Franz Schubert
Gwendolyn DeLaney, mezzo-soprano; Ben Malkevitch, piano

Call to Worship

Leader: God speaks to the heart,
People: Offering compassion and hope.
Leader: God enlivens the mind,
People: Inviting curiosity and wonder.
Leader: God awakens all spirits,
People: Fostering sacred connection.
Leader: God nurtures our strength,
People: Creating unimagined possibilities.
Leader: God calls the whole world,
People: Inspiring extravagant love.

Invocation

Creating Spirit, we join with the chorus of all of creation to celebrate your wondrous deeds. Fill us with your joy and train our ears for harmony, so that we may contribute to the world you are already creating. All this we pray in the name of Jesus, who revealed what is possible through love. Amen.

Hymn *All Creatures of Our God and King*

LCC Virtual Choir

Victoria Peacock, soprano; Gwendolyn DeLaney, alto;

Steve Hotchkiss and Michael Komperda, tenors;

Noah Hamrick and Robert Wenz, basses

Ben Malkevitch, organ

*All creatures of our God and King,
Lift up your voice with us and sing:
Alleluia! Alleluia!*

*O burning sun with golden beam
And silver moon with softer gleam:
O praise God, O praise God!
Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!*

*O rushing wind with voice so strong,
O clouds that sail in heav'n along,
Alleluia! Alleluia!*

*O rising morn, in praise rejoice,
You lights of evening, find a voice.
O praise God, O praise God!
Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!*

*O flowing waters, pure and clear,
Make music for your God to hear.
Alleluia! Alleluia!*

O blazing fire who lights the night,

*Providing worth, enhancing sight,
O praise God, O praise God!
Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!*

*And all forgiven tender hearts,
Forgiving others, take your part,
Alleluia! Alleluia!
You who long pain and sorrow bear,
Praise God who knows your ev'ry care.
O praise God, O praise God!
Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!*

Pastoral Prayer

Gracious and loving God, we come to you first to give thanks. To thank you for all that you have given us and that you woke us up this morning to breathe new air, to experience a new day, one that you have made and that we shall rejoice and be glad in. We thank you for the connections we have built during this time and for the reuniting of our relationships and our friendships as it becomes safer to do so.

We thank you for the chance to reflect on our own hearts and to unlock and open our spirits to receive you and to send us out into the world in a new way. We ask your presence on all of us in the anxious and liminal space of uncertainty and awkwardness, seeking to understand what it looks like to return to the way things were before but leaving behind that which wasn't serving us and picking up new things that are encouraging us toward more fullness and liberation in you.

We ask your presence upon our physical bodies for healing for those who need it, for energy for those who are tired or lacking energy or uncertain about how to move forward. We ask for your healing upon our mental and emotional states for those of us who live with anxiety and depression and for whatever other mental illnesses come our way; that we might use them as tools to move forward and seek you in a different way not as weights that hold us back.

God we ask your presence upon our community here in Lakewood, we ask your presence upon this world, we ask your presence in the places where the pandemic is surging, we ask for a distribution of vaccines. We ask that you reunite us soon as a body of Christ, as a congregation that you bring us to this space but that when you bring us back we have learned something new about what it is to serve you and to love our neighbor. We ask your continued presence and abiding spirit in our hearts. 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

It is one thing to memorize the words of Jesus. But it is another thing to let those words transform us and rearrange our priorities and our lives. In these moments for quiet and reflection, what is it that God is inviting you to rearrange about your priorities? What is it that you want to offer to the Church and to the world as a practice of God's love?

Dedication Prayer

Holy One, make these gifts expand our imagination to pursue a community driven by unconditional love, a nation rooted in inclusive love, and a world energized by the unwavering love of God. Amen.

Scripture Reading, read by Bill Fraunfelder

John 15:9-17

As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

'This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

Message

So to start, I want to wish you a Happy Mother's Day. To all of the mothers, mother figures, nurturers within our congregation and also inviting you to remember those people who were mothers to you, whether biologically or the women who raised you or the women who cared for you or sometimes those mothers aren't even women, those nurturing figures. And I wish you a blessed Mother's Day and hope that it is a good experience for you, a good day for you.

God may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, for you are our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

I. I want to tell you about a musical project called the "Symphony for a Broken Orchestra." It was a project

initiated by the Philadelphia Public School District in 2017. Basically, the school district had an abundance of broken instruments, these instruments that they had collected over time, and broke more and more each year as they lent them out to students, but they didn't have the budget to repair them. So, a lot of times a student would come in and they would pick an instrument and it would be one that didn't work very well or didn't function in all the ways it was supposed to. I saw one interview with middle school students who spoke to their frustration about searching for an instrument to use, but always finding them with broken strings and keys, bent slides and dented bells, and so many other issues.

- a. The lessons learned (I was a music student through college, I played the bassoon) as an adolescent or teenager through instrumental and vocal music are so powerful: for one person to connect sound to the person next to them and see the way that their abilities combine to make something beautiful is a lesson that feeds us long after we've graduated from those music classrooms. I know so many of you know this very well. It's one of those things that you grow better at over time and you just have those moments where your sounds match and you just know that you're really connecting well to the people around you. So what a frustration it is to have a classroom with so many broken instruments. To have so many restrictions that are not within our control.
- b. But we know the spiritual gifts of creative people-- that when creatives are backed up against a wall, they will find an ingenious, out-of-the-box solution. And so that is what happened here. So the instrumental music teachers from across Philadelphia got together in a city-wide creative

- fundraising effort. They drove all of their broken instruments to one location in collaboration with Temple University School of Art, the Philadelphia Orchestra, the Boyer College of Music and Dance, and many professional and amateur musicians throughout the city, with a plan to develop and perform a unique composition written specifically for the sounds these broken instruments can only make in their broken state. Around 1,500 instruments were brought to the communal location, and 400 of them were chosen to perform in this final symphony. The goal was to raise the funds to get as many of these instruments as possible repaired and back into the Philadelphia School District music classrooms. They did reach and surpass that goal, and many of these broken instruments were repaired and delivered back into the hands of young musicians. They also now have a fund for maintenance and keeping them maintained in the future.
- c. So, once the wounded instruments were gathered together, they commissioned composer David Lang to develop the Symphony for Broken Instruments. They sampled them, each of the 1,500 instruments, they learned their sound, and they recorded and created an archive of how each of the instruments sounded when played. David Lang used that archive to inform him as he composed a piece that could be rehearsed and performed collectively by musicians playing those 400 of the wounded instruments. Some were so broken they were hard to play, or needed to be played in a creative way, but Lang encouraged people to play them in whatever way they could. Lang explained, "I am trying to make the brokenness kind of the foreground. I don't want to

avoid the things that are broken. I don't want to make these instruments sound like we don't notice how changed they are. And so I tried to ask for things that would highlight the fact that they are changed."

- d. So I don't think I can add the video to this one without having copyright issues, but I will add a link to one of the performances in the description below. You'll see the way some of the instruments are used in unique ways to perform...through rhythm, plucking strings, and creating vibrations, and the way the air moves through the instrument. Some played in a fairly typical way, while some trombones make music without a slide, or cellos with a giant crack down the middle.
<https://vimeo.com/287448009>

II. This week, our Unlock theme is O: One Voice. Psalm 98 sings, "Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth; break forth into joyous song and sing praises. Sing praises to the LORD with the lyre, with the lyre and the sound of melody. With trumpets and the sound of the horn make a joyful noise before the King, the LORD. Let the sea roar, and all that fills it; the world and those who live in it. Let the floods clap their hands; let the hills sing together for joy."

- a. I want us to consider what it might look like for us, as a Body of Christ, as a community, as a church family whether virtually gathered or physically embodied together, what it might look like to unlock ourselves in such a way that we can join our voices together as one. To make music together. What is the possibility that, with open and unlocked hearts, we can make music...make an impact...make a joyful noise together not in spite of our imperfections and woundedness and peculiarities

but because of our imperfections and woundedness and peculiarities.

- b. I've noticed how frequently so many of us speak of the music we plan to make once we've figured things out: once I get this fixed, I'll be able to do this. If I can get to this weight, I can do this. If I get this much money, I'll start doing this... when the pandemic is over, we can do this. When the church is open again, I'll start doing this. I wonder how we can open our hearts to the way in which the Spirit is leading us into discernment and unlocking us to be who God called us to be not when and if, but now and because of our freedom in God's love, and the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit.

III. Our Gospel lesson for today says, "Abide in my love...that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete." I love the word abide: to make a home in Jesus' love. To create a space to heal and grow, to fill our cup, to listen attentively, but not in fear. To begin again and to rest.

- a. When we abide in the love of God, in Christ's love, under the gentle wing of the Holy Spirit, we are filled to the brim with joy, and it cannot be taken away. (Sidenote that the whole time I was writing this sermon I had that Gospel song in my head: This joy that I have-- the world can't give it, the world can't take it away).
- b. Anyway, to abide means that we are a good thing just the way we are. Theologian and writer Debie Thomas says, "My problem is that I often treat Jesus as a role model, and then despair when I can't live up to his high standards. But abiding in something is not the same as emulating it...Jesus's love is not our example; it's our source. It's where our love originates and deepens. Where it replenishes itself. In other words, if we don't abide, we can't love.

Jesus's commandment to us is not that we wear ourselves out, trying to conjure love from our own easily depleted resources. Rather, it's that we abide in the holy place where divine love becomes possible. That we make our home in Jesus's love – the most abundant and inexhaustible love in existence.”

- IV. What I love about abiding is that when we rest and trust in Christ's love for us just as we are, as we were created by God (and God said that we were very good), we are able to tap into our unique and creative gifts not in spite of our flaws and pains, but because our flaws and wounds make us beautiful, powerful, and sacred.
- a. When we rest and trust in Christ's love for us just as we are, as we were created by God (and God said that we were very good), we are able to tap into our unique and creative gifts not “Later” and “when the stars align perfectly” and “if only I had this and that” and “when the world is back to normal,” but because those restrictions and schedule conflicts and broken valves and keys present us with an opportunity to join our voices in a new, beautiful, and resonating song.
 - b. We are becoming who we are as we abide Christ within the complex brokenness of the world. We are being liberated as we come to terms with our ability to overcome any restriction the world places in our way. Christ gives us joy...the world can't give it, the world can't take it away.
- V. I wonder, as we each commit to abiding in love, as we each commit to becoming who God created us to be not in spite of our flaws and wounds but because of them, what kind of symphony we might compose and perform together for the world?

- a. I wonder what it looks like to unlock our hearts to join together as One Voice in our movement, in our rhythm, in our dance, loving one another as God has loved us, and loving the world in all its complexities and making music never heard before, imperfect but uniquely world-changing.

- VI. Like I said last week, our faith begins and ends with love. It doesn't begin and end with the perfect time and the perfect body and the perfect calling and the perfect circumstances. Our faith doesn't begin or end when and if the time is right. Our faith begins and ends because of who God has created us to be and in the midst of whatever the world's challenges are. And so, thanks be to God, we are composing this symphony together, as one voice, unlocking our music and sending it out into the world. Amen.

Benediction

Go forth from this place, even if you stay right where you are. Joining your voice in song to transform possibility into reality and to join alongside God in transforming the world. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, one God, Mother of us all. Amen.

Postlude

Laetatus sum by Norman Warren
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.*

