



Brookline Community Church
Worshiping Apart
Reverend Catherine Merrill, Minister
Fourth Sunday in Lent
March 22, 2020

Centering Ourselves for Worship:

Loving God, this week we've begun to discover just how small our homes are, and how big the challenge is that we are facing. And it frightens us a bit. Maybe more than a bit. And we wonder if you are with us.

We know we're not supposed to wonder. Because in the wilderness near Sinai, on the cross at Golgotha, you promised you would always be with us, to the end of the age. So help us set aside our fears and worries and high pitched whining noise that seems to run through the back of our heads all the time these days. Help us to just be here with you and with the others who are gathered together even as we are spread apart. Help us to worship and know you are with us.

Amen.

Let Your Living Water Flow

[Click here](#) for a video that will give you the lyrics and someone to sing with.

[This week, the Music Ministry folks pointed me at videos with other folks singing, so we don't feel so alone as we sing.]

Lifting Up Our Joys & Concerns:

Loving God,
you are the giver of living water,
the source of deepest compassion,
the fountain of eternal life.

Therefore we pray to you:
Wellspring of mercy, hear our prayer.

For all who are thirsty—
thirsty for a life of meaning,
thirsty for a word of grace,
thirsty for a drink of water . . .
Wellspring of mercy, hear our prayer.

For all who are riding a way of joy
For Russell & Susan, welcoming the arrival of their new grandson, Wesley Alan Covino, who arrived safely on March 17. Both he and Kerri are doing well.

For Dave Larkin, who celebrated his 7nth birthday last weekend cancer free. One of the gifts he received was a family treasure, a painting of a merchant ship under full sail. He remembers standing in front of that picture and hearing family stories from his great-grandmother.

For members of this congregation who stepped in to help me find and test the resources we needed to continue to worship together even as we remain apart.

For the birds on their feeders on one side of the window and the cat on the other side, working out an arrangement.

For everyone taking it seriously enough that we can stop worrying about our immediate families.

For the beautiful blue skies of this week, a deeper and cleaner blue as the pollution and air traffic have dropped away.

[say aloud those places where you found joy this week]

All these joys assure us that you are with us and we offer our thanks
Wellspring of mercy, hear our prayer.

For all who are weary—
weary from life's long journey,
weary from quarreling and testing,
weary from pain or grief . . .
Wellspring of mercy, hear our prayer.

For all who are swamped under waves of concern,
Like Flo, Marjorie's mom, who fell again and fractured her hip. The surgery to
insert a pin went well, but she was still in the hospital.

Like friends & family of Ray Richeson, Jocelyn's uncle and Jane's brother-in-law,
who passed away recently. His memorial service in Virginia will be postponed
until it's less complicated to gather as a family.

Like all those who are panicking in the face of the virus, that they might let go of
their fear,

Like the homeless, who have no where to retreat in isolation, and whose places
of refuge (libraries, malls, shelters) are closing down, that we may find a more
permanent approach to homelessness.

Like those suffering from domestic violence, who are caught at home with their
abusers at a time of rising stress, and therefore rising abuse, that they find safe
havens.

Like all those who are dealing with health problems at the moment, all those
whose surgeries have been postponed, all those who need medical attention and
worry they are taking attention away from the pandemic response.

Like all those who are a part of the response, searching for vaccines, deploying
test kits, stocking shelves, doing on-line lessons, delivering food, cleaning,
cleaning, cleaning

Like [say aloud those concerns you'd like to raise]

For all those who are wondering if you are with them, help them to know that you
are always with them.

Wellspring of mercy, hear our prayer.

For all who are broken—
broken by sin and suffering,
broken by hard disappointment,
broken by acts of violence . . .
Wellspring of mercy, hear our prayer.

Living God, through your Spirit,
pour your love into our hearts,
your grace into our lives,
your healing into our world,
until the earth is filled with your glory
as the waters cover the sea;
through Jesus Christ we pray this prayer and the prayer he taught us

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 trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

[For next week, please feel free to send me your joys & concerns and I'll include them in our prayers: minister@bccnh.org or call/text (978) 494-6953.]

SCRIPTURE READING: Exodus 17:1-7

[If you'd like to hear it read aloud, [here I am, at your service!](#) If you'd like to read the Scripture in future services, let me know and we'll get you to make a video we can upload for everyone.]

From the wilderness of Sin the whole congregation of the Israelites journeyed by stages, as the LORD commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. The people quarreled with Moses, and said, 'Give us water to drink.' Moses said to them, 'Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?' But the people thirsted there for water; and the people complained against Moses and said, 'Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?' So Moses cried out to the LORD, 'What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me.' The LORD said to Moses, 'Go on ahead of the people, and take some of the elders of Israel with you; take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink.' Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. He called the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarreled and tested the LORD, saying, 'Is the LORD among us or not?'

Reflection on the Scripture:

[Either read or [watch the video](#) of me offering the reflection.]

Today wasn't supposed to be like this. Today was supposed to be the first time in my *life* I wore jeans to church. Please don't tell my mother I was even planning on doing that. Because we were going to be busy after worship getting the church ready for the new windows to arrive on Monday. I was supposed to be in my jeans, in the pulpit that has my reading glasses and a life saver right where I left it. I wasn't supposed to be standing at my ironing board with a file box on it and then a paper box on top of that, with my iPhone resting on a jar opener so it wouldn't slip while I talked.

Today wasn't supposed to be like this. Jane was supposed to be down in Virginia, comforting her sister because of Ray's passing. Becca and Andrew and Maddie were supposed to be in class or on Spring Break, either way, their parents wouldn't really have any idea where they were. Carol was supposed to be recruiting people to cook bacon for next Saturday's Breakfast Buffet. But none of that is happening. None of that is happening. Today wasn't supposed to be like this.

That's what the Israelites were saying. They had listened to Moses and heard him talking about the power of God, about how God wanted to lead them out of slavery in Egypt and into the Promised Land. And that sounded so good. And God was so powerful¹ that even Pharaoh, even Pharaoh and all his gods, couldn't win against the God Moses followed. The God that Moses spoke with laid a path in the sea, led the Israelites through it, and brought it crashing down on their oppressors. That's power. And that's what their God had.

It's easy to believe in God, when you have everything you want, everything you need.² It's easy to believe that God is with you every step of the way, when you're making plans and they're going smoothly and you're doing your job the way you're supposed to, with the resources you need. But when you hungry and thirsty, when you a legitimately afraid that nothing is in your control anymore, well then you start to wonder, "*Is the LORD among us or not?*" (Exodus 17:7).

¹ J. Coert Rylaarsdam, "The Book of Exodus: Introduction," vol. 1 in *The Interpreter's Bible: The Holy Bible in the King James and Revised Standard Versions with General Articles and Introduction, Exegesis, Exposition for Each Book of the Bible*, ed. George Arthur Buttrick, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1952), 846.

² Frederick Niedner, "Third Sunday in Lent, Theological Perspective, Exodus 17:1-7" in *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary, Year A, Volume 2*, ed. David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010], 74.

The Israelites had already gone through some bad times. They only had what they could carry with them. They had run out of food so God had begun to provide manna. They were walking through a wilderness in a desert land. And they were out of water. That's pretty bad. In their minds, they were thinking back to slavery in Egypt when they were oppressed, but where there was at least water to drink. They were really frightened of what came next. So yes, they quarreled with each other and they tested God. That what Massa and Meribah mean, testing and quarreling.³

So the Israelites insisted that God produce for them on demand. If God produces, then God is *among us*. If not, then we're on our own. God has become a means to an end, something that is there to serve Israel's own sense of self. Israel's focus is not on God, but on what God can do for them.⁴

Yes, we're in the middle of a pandemic. But we're also in the middle of Lent. Lent is the time when we step back from the gifts of the powerful systems that surround us, gifts that come with an enormous price tag, and we return to the commands and promises of God. God's way in the world is lean and precarious. God leads us to trust in miracles that the powerful had judged impossible.⁵

Not the miracle that this virus will suddenly go away. It won't. Not the miracle that people won't die. They will. People we know. People we love. I was on the phone with a church member this week and he asked if anyone in the church had the virus. I said that as far as I knew, no. That as far as I knew, everyone was sleeping in their own home, safe and sound. But chances are that someone does have the virus. Maybe me. Maybe him. We may be thirsty now. But we know it's going to get a whole lot worse in the next few weeks.

So what are these miracles that God is leading us to? Well, they are the miracles we thought were impossible a generation ago. You exposed your kid to German measles when they were little because that was the best way to ensure they didn't get regular measles later on. Tuberculosis meant you went into a sanatorium even if you were eleven and really wanted to be home with your mom. Polio meant you died. Having some other option was a miracle.

³ Carol A. Newsom, "Third Sunday in Lent, Exegetical Perspective, Exodus 17:1-7" in *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary, Year A, Volume 2*, ed. David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010], 79.

⁴ Walter Brueggemann, "Third Sunday in Lent: Exodus 17:1-7" in *Texts for Preaching: A Lectionary Commentary Based on the NRSV – Year A*, ed. Walter Brueggemann et al. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 202.

⁵ Brueggemann, 202.

And the little miracles from today, that a casual mention of a kid loving black beans would mean [three cans showed up on the porch the next morning](#). That the keepers at the zoo would worry about the penguins needing enrichment, [so would take them on a tour of the aquarium](#). That the folks at Walmart and Target and Market Basket would keep coming in day after day after day to restock the shelves so we wouldn't be so worried. That the doctors and nurses would keep showing up, even when they are exhausted and frightened for their own families in ways that the rest of us cannot even imagine.

Take a minute to think of where in your own life you might see miracles like these in the coming week. Because being assured that God is with you is going to make the coming week much easier to take. I'll give you a minute, but remember you can even pause the video if you want more time.

[Pause]

So yes, today was not supposed to be like this. We were supposed to be together, getting ready to have our little church get a major upgrade and be a safer and warmer place for us to gather and feel God's power and presence. To get ready to celebrate the fact of God's power through the resurrection of Jesus Christ on Easter Sunday. And instead, we are all spread apart. And we are facing a situation which is only going to get scarier. In all likelihood, we will test God. And we're already quarreling with each other because this house isn't big enough for two Zoom meetings and an episode of Dora the Explorer. Welcome to Massa and Meribah. But if you for one moment wonder "*Is the LORD among us or not?*", look for the miracles that the powerful have judged impossible. Because they are there. Even today, which was not supposed to be like this. God is just that powerful. If you will only allow yourself to look.

Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus

[Click here](#) for a video that will give you the lyrics and someone to sing with.

[This week, the Music Ministry folks pointed me to videos with other folks singing, so we don't feel so alone as we sing. I'm so grateful for their help.]

A Prayer to Send us Back Out into the World

Lord God, Great I AM,
you are living water.

As we worship you this day
show us who we are:
channels of your love
and vessels of your grace.

Show us that you are with us
ever and always;
So that we may go out into the world
and show your love and grace to others.

Help us to feel your presence in the coming week
When the news gets tough
When the house gets cramped
When the emails get snippy
When the video conference technology gets overwhelmed.

We thank you for all you have given us
All the big and small miracles you have done
So that we might never doubt you were with us
We pray this prayer
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

[CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE: # 839 "God Be With You Till We Meet Again;
by his counsels guide, uphold you, with his sheep securely fold you; God be with
you till we meet again."](#)

[The Music Ministry crew made this bit of video for us, so we could all sing
together]

Here ends our worship, now let our service begin.



PRAYER LIST (3/22/20)

If you know those on this list, call on them & tell them we are praying for them. If you know others who should be added to this list please give their names to the minister or a deacon.

- Rev. Tom Atherton, failing from Parkinson's
- Friends & family of Nell Smallwood, Beatrice Maude Charewicz, Win Hall, Bruce Garvin, Louise Price, Eddy Whitcomb, Shirley Jeffreys, Hazel Corey, Jean & Duke, David & Dougy Connors, Jerry King, Tre Rouse, and Tasha Feller.
- For those who are struggling with depression, addiction, mental health issues, and in their marriages
- Luca, Amy's nephew, as his new treatment appears to be having effect
- Ethel Long who is recovering from hip replacement surgery while she helps Ron get back on his feet after breaking an ankle and getting a pacemaker put in
- God's grace and healing for us all
- Dave, continuing to recover now that he is in remission
- Pat Tiner, Candy's mother-in-law, who died of a heart attack. Prayers for the whole Tiner clan, including Ciara, who misses her Nana terribly
- Those affected by the corona virus around the world and those working to limit its impact
- The families who step up when needed, whether we're the ones stepping up or the ones in need
- Flo, Marjorie's mom, who fell again and fractured her hip.
- The friends & family of Ray Richeson, Jocelyn's uncle and Jane's brother-in-law, who passed away recently.
- All those who are panicking in the face of the virus, that they might let go of their fear.
- The homeless, who have no where to shelter in isolation, and whose places of refuge (libraries, malls, shelters) are closing down, that we may find a more productive approach to homelessness.
- Those suffering from domestic violence, who are caught at home with their abusers at a time of rising stress, and therefore rising abuse, that they might find safe havens.
- All those who are dealing with health problems at the moment, all those whose surgeries have been postponed, all those who need medical attention and worry they are taking attention away from the pandemic response.
- Individuals serving in our military & their families

Household Prayer: Morning

O God, I know that you are the Lord, for you gave me my life, and caused me to rise this day. Put your Spirit within me, and let my words and actions help others to know that you are my Lord and my God. Amen.

Household Prayer: Evening

My soul waits for you, O Lord, more than those who watch for morning, more than those who watch for morning. Help me to sleep this night in peace, trusting that you will awaken me; through Jesus Christ my Savior. Amen.

Questions for Reflection

Think about the meaning of water—its symbolic qualities, its presence in nature, and its use in human life. How is Jesus like water? What are the things that are most necessary in your life? Where do you get them? Identify service project that provides clean water (or some other necessity of life) to people in need. Consider making a commitment to pray for all the providers and recipients of this service as well as any other support you might be able to provide.

Daily Awareness Reflection

At the end of the day, before I start to relax, I've been asking myself the following questions. I jot down the answers and ask them again the next evening. I've found it helps me to remain centered as well as increasing my awareness of God in my life. It takes about 10 minutes.

1. Slow down. Stop. Prepare yourself to pray by becoming aware of the love with which God looks on you ...
2. Note the gifts God has given you today. Give thanks to God for them ...
3. Ask God that the next few minutes be a time of special grace and revelation ...
4. With God, review the day. Look at the stirrings of your heart, your thoughts, and your choices as the day progressed. Which have been of God? Which have not? What does God want to say to you about both? ...
5. Ask God for forgiveness for any failure or omission, and for healing from their effects ...
6. Look forward to the following day, and plan concretely with God how to live it according to God's desire for your life ...

From Elizabeth Liebert's *The Soul of Discernment* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2015), p. 31.