



Brookline Community Church
Worshiping Apart
Reverend Catherine Merrill, Minister
April 19, 2020

Centering Ourselves for Worship:

God of signs and wonders,
you have revealed to us that
Jesus Christ is your son and our Savior.
Strengthen our faith,
that we may have life in Christ's name.

Strengthen our faith
that we may have hope in the face of challenges
that we may see humor in the grimness that surrounds us
that we may hear tenderness beneath the stress in the voices of those we love.

Strengthen our faith
that we may help those whose lives we can improve
that we may pray for those who are doing the grinding, hard work
that we may find patience with those thrashing as they are overwhelmed.

God of signs and wonders
Strengthen our faith
So our doubts don't overwhelm us
So our doubts don't shut us off from your love in this world.
Strengthen our faith for so many reasons. **Amen.**

Hymn: Down to the River

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

As I went down in the river to pray
Studying about that good ol' way
And who shall wear the starry crown
Good Lord, show me the way

O sisters, let's go down
Let's go down, come on down
O sisters, let's go down
Down in the river to pray

As I went down in the river to pray
Studying about that good ol' way
And who shall wear the robe and crown
Good Lord, show me the way

O brothers, let's go down
Let's go down, come on down
Come on, brothers, let's go down
Down in the river to pray

As I went down in the river to pray
Studying about that good ol' way
And who shall wear the starry crown
Good Lord, show me the way

O fathers, let's go down
Let's go down, come on down
O fathers, let's go down
Down in the river to pray

As I went down in the river to pray
Studying about that good ol' way
And who shall wear the robe and crown
Good Lord, show me the way

O mothers, let's go down
Let's go down, don't you wanna go down?
Come on, mothers, let's go down
Down in the river to pray

As I went down in the river to pray
Studying about that good ol' way
And who shall wear the starry crown
Good Lord, show me the way

O sinners, let's go down
Let's go down, come on down
O sinners, let's go down
Down in the river to pray

As I went down in the river to pray
Studying about that good ol' way
And who shall wear the starry crown
Good Lord, show me the way

Thanks to Megan King for sending me this hymn. If you have a favorite, send it along to me and I'll find a service to put it in.

Lifting Up Our Joys & Concerns:

O God of Signs and Wonders,
When we aren't sure,
help us be calm;

when information comes
from all sides, correct and not,
help us to discern;

when fear makes it hard to breathe,
and anxiety seems to be the order of the day,
slow us down, God;

help us to reach out with our hearts,
when we can't touch with our hands;

help us to be socially connected,
when we have to be socially distant;

help us to love as perfectly as we can,
knowing that "perfect love casts out all fear."

Help us, O God,
that we might help each other.

Help us to sing with those lifted up with joy:

For the families in the community who have gotten take home meals to make their stay-at-home time more savory;

For Linda Saari's son's family, who are moving into her home, since their home is not ready. Linda and Larry will be heading up to their log cabin up North for a while to give everyone more room.

Help us, O God,
That we might help each other.

Help us to carry the burdens of those weighed down with concerns:

For Maggie, David Drake's mom, who's 93 in a nursing home and has just been diagnosed with Covid-19. She has a fever and is in isolation.

For Andy, Dorothy and Ray's friend, who's just learned that his lymphoma has returned. For Andy's wife, Lisa, whose support he relies on. We pray that his outcome will be successful.

For the town of Brookline, making its appearance on the Covid-19 map for the first time, even if the virus was here before the paperwork got going.

To Ely and Pam Austen, Amy's neighbors, who have both been diagnosed with Covid-19. Ely is in the hospital. May our good friends and neighbors make a rapid recovery.

For Nicu and the rest of the first medical reserve to be called up who are currently serving in New York City. May they be able to effectively do what they have trained for and return home safely.

For those who are feeling the weight of being alone even more;

For MJ's mom who's been diagnosed with Covid-19, John Panto works with MJ;

For Baby Jack and his parents Amy-Lee and Ryan Schanck, Susan & Russell's daughter's friends, Jack went into the hospital with a bad cold and once through that, he had successful heart surgery;

For Socks and Sam, Dorothy & Ray's beloved dogs, who passed away within weeks of each other, reminding us all of how much love can fit into four paws;

For those who are dying alone or dying at home, unseen and uncared for;

For the every day disasters like house fires, which are even getting mentioned because of the pandemic;

For students whose terms are coming to an end and who are going to be at loose ends soon, particularly those seniors who are graduating from college;

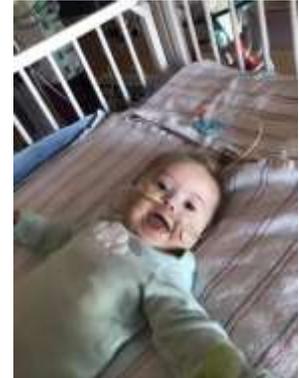
We pray that we can maintain an awareness of others, that we can go deeper, that we can find patience, both individually and nationally, that we can better live with our helplessness and find ways to *do* something, that the feeling of being drained will pass.

In the love of the Creator,
in the name of the Healer,
in the life of the Holy Spirit that is in all and with all,
we pray this prayer and the one your son taught us:

[\[Let's say the Lord's Prayer together\]](#)

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: John 20:19-31

[\[John 20:19-31 read for you.\]](#)

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.'

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord.' But he said to them, 'Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.'

A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.' Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!' Jesus said to him, 'Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.'

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

Reflection on the Scripture:

[\[The video of the reflection.\]](#)

Where are you abiding these days? I know, I know. In our homes. But really, where are you *abiding*? In my sweat pants. In my kitchen for three flaming meals a day and don't get used to it. In the Zoom screens and if I need to take one more meeting there, Things are Going to be Said. Where are you abiding? In a vague no man's land between back then when so many things were normal I didn't call them "normal," I just called them "life" and some hazy future that I can't imagine at the moment. I'm abiding in a hand cracking fog of cleaning, cleaning, cleaning. I'm abiding in a sea of worry for my neighbors, for the folks in the nursing home, for my job and financial prospects. I'm abiding in a half-remembered tour of isosceles triangles as I help my kid keep up with her school work. I'm abiding in an unending series of walks with the dog, our time at home being merely an extended pause between tours of the neighborhood and beyond.

For the Gospel of John, where today's reading comes from, believing in Jesus wasn't about agreeing to a list of ideas. Believing in Jesus means you are abiding in Jesus.¹ Believing in Jesus means you are living inside the relationship you have with Jesus. Believing in Jesus means your whole life, three meals a day, Zoom meetings, walks with the dog, cleaning, worrying, all of those activities are anchored in your relationship with Jesus.

In the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, Jesus goes to Jerusalem on Palm Sunday and almost immediately we hear of the Last Supper and his trial and crucifixion. In the Gospel of John, he goes to Jerusalem and then there are chapters and chapters of his teaching before we hear the stories of Jesus' last week. So it's easy to forget that after Jesus announced he would go to Jerusalem, Thomas said, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." (John 11:16).

Like the others who had given up their normal lives to follow Jesus, Thomas had a deep relationship with Jesus. Thomas had left behind so much in order to abide with Jesus. In becoming a disciple of Jesus, by building his whole life around that relationship, Thomas has experienced what it means to live with the reality that the reign of God is at hand, that that reality must shape the teaching, healing, and confrontations for justice that flow from it.² Thomas isn't surprised by the Cross.³ There is no way you can abide in the reign of God being at hand

¹ Karoline Lewis, "Commentary on the Gospel: John 20:19-31", Working Preacher "Lectionary Commentaries for May 1, 2011, Second Sunday of Easter", https://www.workingpreacher.org/wp_print_all.aspx?lectionary_calendar_id=198&print_type=comm&is_spanish=0 (accessed 13 April 2020)

² D. Cameron Murchison, "Second Sunday of Easter, Theological Perspective, John 20:19-31" 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, 2011), 398.

³ William Barclay, *The Gospel of John*. Vol. 1. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975), 275.

and not expect the Cross. You're just too dangerous for the powers and principalities of this world. Thomas' relationship with Jesus has him not only expecting the Cross, but embracing it as a reality that will end his own life. That's where Thomas is abiding.

When Thomas hears about Jesus standing among the other disciples behind the locked door (John 20:19), I don't think he's asking for anything special, or anything more special than what they experienced. I mean, the Cross he expected. But when the dead won't even stay dead, what can you count on in this world?⁴ So, sure, the appearance of Jesus takes a little processing. But way more importantly, Thomas had a relationship with Jesus, who lived his life proclaiming that the reign of God was at hand and we needed to start living that way. We needed to start acting like we loved God and we loved our neighbors. We needed to act in ways that the political and religious authorities were definitely not going to be happy with.

Thomas needs to know that the man who appeared in their midst on that Easter Sunday was really, truly the man they had followed to Jerusalem. Because the power of the Resurrection comes from the reality that the actions you took in life because of your relationship with Jesus continue on to the other side of death. Thomas has to know, beyond the shadow of a doubt that abiding in Jesus in life creates the reality that he will abide in Jesus after death. That nothing, not even death itself, can sever that relationship.

That matters to me too. I know we have 2,000 years between Thomas and us. But if the same guy who was only too human, who wept and ate with outsiders and who made sure there was plenty of wine at a wedding isn't the same guy who offers peace on Easter evening (John 20:19), then I doubt I abide in my relationship with Jesus as deeply.

I know enough about cars not to be bamboozled at the dealership when my car is being serviced. I also know enough about cars to ask someone who's a real expert. I don't need to know why they answer my question the way they do, because I know they have dug in far more deeply than I ever will and that is good enough. So when Thomas says, 1) *"Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."* (John 20:25) and 2) *"My Lord and my God!"* (John 20:28), I'm grateful. Thomas is worried about what I'm worried about: does my relationship with Jesus survive death? And he gets his answer. I don't need to know if he actually saw and touched. He got his answer. And I can rely on his answer for mine.⁵

⁴ Anna Carter Florence, "Second Sunday of Advent," in *Preaching Year A with Anna Carter Florence: Reflections on the Gospel Readings (2016-2017) Revised Common Lectionary*. (St. Paul, MN: Luther Seminary, 2016), 58.

⁵ Murchison, 398.

When Thomas says, “*My Lord and my God!*”, he’s claiming, reclaiming, returning to the relationship he has with Jesus. In the Gospel of John, sin is failing to have a relationship with God through Jesus.⁶ In the Gospel of John, being a witness doesn’t mean knowing something, it means living your life so others get drawn into relationship with God through your actions.⁷ So when Jesus assures the disciples that *If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained* (John 20:23), he’s basically saying, as witnesses, they need to forgive others. And they need to live their lives so that others are brought into relationship with God.

Where are you abiding? Are you forgiving others? Are you living so that others come into relationship with God? [Pause]. I can get so caught up in tending to relationships with others that I neglect to tend my relationship with God. And once that begins to languish, there’s no amount of living I can do that can help others come into relationship with God. So wherever you’re abiding these days, take some time to figure out how you can say, “My Lord and my God!”, how you can emphasize your relationship with the reign of God in this world. Because that is beyond doubt part of living into the reality of the Resurrection.

Prayer of Dedication for the Gifts We’ve Been Given

O God of Signs and Wonders,
you are our portion and our cup.

In you our hearts are glad, our souls rejoice, and our bodies rest.
Bless and multiply our offerings and pledges
that they may bring the joy of your presence
more deeply into the world
which is in such need of you at this time of trial. **Amen.**

Hymn: Abide with Me

[Click here](#) for a video that will give you the lyrics and someone to sing with. We used the hymn in the Maundy Thursday service. You might also remember it from a few months ago when the choir sang it in the sanctuary.

⁶ Karoline Lewis, *John: Fortress Biblical Preaching Commentary*. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2014), 247.

⁷ Lewis, 247.

A Prayer to Send us Back Out into the World

O God of Signs and Wonders,
We don't want to doubt, but we do
We don't want to fear, but we do
We don't want to withdraw, protect, judge, isolate, scorn others, but we do.

Help us to accept what those early disciples accepted. That you died, that you rose again, that we are promised the same. That in that complete upheaval, that even death can't be final, that you are with us always. Wishing us peace, showing your love, accepting our doubts, as you have accepted us always.

[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, with each other and our former selves!]

Here ends our worship, now let our service begin.



PRAYER LIST (4/19/20)

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, Jerry King, Tre Rouse, Tasha Feller, Pat Tiner and Terry House.
- 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
- God's grace and healing for us all
- Those affected by the corona virus around the world and those working to limit its impact
- 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.
- For Peter Fleming, one of Lisa's friends from the Milford Special Needs group that meets monthly, who is in the hospital with a brain tumor.
- For the virus staying out of Ledgewood, where Carol works, and all the other assisted living facilities.
- For Aunt Rose, Amy's relative, a sweet little Italian lady with compromised lungs who's in the hospital with Covid-19;
- For all those who have lost their jobs and are facing economic insecurity at a time when there is no useful way to look for work;
- For Maggie, David Drake's mom, who's 93 in a nursing home and has just been diagnosed with Covid-19. She has a fever and is in isolation;
- For Andy, Dorothy and Ray's friend, who's just learned that his lymphoma has returned. For Andy's wife, Lisa, whose support he relies on. We pray that his outcome will be successful.
- For the town of Brookline, making its appearance on the Covid-19 map for the first time, even if the virus was here before the paperwork got going.
- To Ely and Pam Austen, Amy's neighbors, who have both been diagnosed with Covid-19. Ely is in the hospital. May our good friends and neighbors make a rapid recovery.

- For Nicu and the rest of the first medical reserve to be called up who are currently serving in New York City. May they be able to effectively do what they have trained for and return home safely.
- For those who are feeling the weight of being alone even more;
- For MJ's mom who's been diagnosed with Covid-19, John Panto works with MJ;
- For Baby Jack and his parents Amy-Lee and Ryan Schanck, Susan & Russell's daughter's friends, Jack went into the hospital with a bad cold and once through that, he had successful heart surgery
- For Socks and Sam, Dorothy & Ray's beloved dogs, who passed away within weeks of each other, reminding us all of how much love can fit into four paws.
- For those who are dying alone or dying at home, unseen and uncounted;
- For the every day disasters like house fires, which are even getting mentioned because of the pandemic;
- For students whose terms are coming to an end and who are going to be at loose ends soon, particularly those seniors who are graduating from college;
- For those who have no one to pray for them, accept our prayers;
- Individuals serving in our military & their families

Household Prayer: Morning

Holy One, you have made known to me the ways of life and have promised to fill me with the gladness of your presence. Keep me mindful of your guidance and your promise as I travel through this day, that my heart may be glad. Amen.

Household Prayer: Evening

Thank you, God, for giving me your counsel today. Tonight, as I sleep, may the dreams of my heart also serve to instruct me in your ways. In you I have a good heritage, and my heart, my soul, and my body rest in you. Amen

Questions for Reflection

According to the gospel, Christ's wounds were not erased by the resurrection. In fact, he invites Thomas and the other disciples to touch his wounds to bring the disciples back to faith. How might we in the church use our wounds to help others come to faith?

Daily Awareness Reflection

At the end of the day, 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.

Announcements:

This time of isolation can be very difficult. You may know someone who needs some support beyond what you can provide. We're in this together.

- Suicide prevention: 1-800-273-8255
- Sexual assault: 1-800-656-4673
- Domestic violence: 1-800-799-7233

Melanie, our state senator asked to pass along the following two pieces of information:

- If people want to know the latest status of Covid-19 in NH and the Emergency orders to date, go to <https://www.nh.gov/covid19/>
- A great video explaining Covid-19, what and how we fight it and why what we are doing is so important:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fgBla7RepXU>

Brookline Food Pantry

Although we cannot be together physically at this time, Outreach is continuing to work with Rebecca Purdin through the Brookline Welfare office & CERT (Community Emergency Response Team) to address any needs in our community.

The Brookline food pantry is now open on Tuesdays & Thursdays from 10-2:00 for drop-offs only. There is a list on the [Brookline Food Pantry's Facebook page](#) that is being updated as items are needed. At the moment, the greatest need is for cash donations.

If you know of anyone who could use some help from the Food Pantry, please let Rebecca or Amy know. We sense there's more need in the community than is currently picking up food.

Donations can be dropped off downstairs at the Town Hall during regular hours of operation. There are large boxes for donations if there is no one in the Food Pantry. There is also a drop off at the Brookline Post Office.

Thank you for your continued support to our church and our community.

Covid-19 Scams Targeting Seniors

The [NH Attorney General's office put out a press release](#) describing several scams that are targeting seniors. The claims range from needing personal information to get their Social Security payments, to being family members in need of cash to treat Covid-19 symptoms, to offers of fake medical products to prevent Covid-19, to needing personal information to get their stimulus checks, to fake charities. (Honestly, what are people like?).

Please pass the word to anyone who might be affected.