



Brookline Community Church
Worshiping Apart
Reverend Catherine Merrill, Minister
May 10, 2020
The Fifth Sunday of Easter

Every part of worship has a video, so we've gathered them [together in a play list](#). [If you click on "Play All"](#), they'll play from the beginning of the service to the end! And you can just follow along, never clicking on another link. Or you can go through clicking on all the individual links – your choice.

Prelude: [A Mighty Fortress by Heartson](#), a ministry of Cedarville University

[No lyrics, just let it help you get settled for worship – Wouldn't Martin Luther (who wrote the song originally), just love this!?!]

Centering Ourselves for Worship:

[Join Melanie Levesque, today's lay leader, [in our centering prayer](#).]

Mothering God,
"Is there a prayer about trying to help a child
figure out the volume of a prism
while trying to meet a client at the same time?"

I think about my week —
when Arbor Day came and I did not plant a tree.

I bowed my head for Yom Hashoah
as Jewish neighbors
lit virtual candles for names
of those lost in the Holocaust,

On ANZAC day in Australia
and Aotearoa New Zealand —
the courage and losses of world wars
are as fresh as poppies
cut by children in red paper
while people woke at six
to stand in driveways or by mailboxes
in a social distance salute.

Ramadan began, too, in fasting and prayer
with its holy center this year
in homes of the faithful,

Blessed is this time
when we are connected in deep old ways,
and show we know it
by learning new ways —

to mark the prism and the prayer,
that both bend light into hope. Amen.

Hymn: *In the Bulb There is a Flower* by John McDermott

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

In the bulb there is a flower;
in the seed, an apple tree;
in cocoons, a hidden promise:
butterflies will soon be free!
In the cold and snow of winter
there's a spring that waits to be,
unrevealed until its season,
something God alone can see.

There's a song in every silence,
seeking word and melody;
there's a dawn in every darkness,
bringing hope to you and me.
From the past will come the future;
what it holds, a mystery,
unrevealed until its season,
something God alone can see.

In our end is our beginning;
in our time, infinity;
in our doubt there is believing;
in our life, eternity.
In our death, a resurrection;
at the last, a victory,
unrevealed until its season,
something God alone can see.

If you have a favorite hymn you'd like to include in our worship service, just send it along and I'll look for a good place for it.

Lifting Up Our Joys & Concerns:

[Rev. Cath [sharing our Joys & Concerns.](#)]

Mothering God,
We have come to you
Through your son,
The living stone,
Rejected by mortals
But really a cornerstone, chosen and precious;
and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.

We long to be living stones
Like him
Built into a spiritual house
To offer spiritual sacrifices which are acceptable to you.

We long to be a holy priesthood,
Lifting up our joys to you,
To celebrate the abundant life you call us to.
Lifting up joys:

That there's only a few more weeks of homeschooling to go

That there are still birthdays and parties during the pandemic, even if they
get celebrated differently

That Aunt Rose is home for the hospital

That Stella is a great guard dog for little Wesley

That ear tube surgeries can go forward so long as we can figure out how to
test a little tyke,

That we can still go canoeing to celebrate Lisa Haight's Cinco de Mayo
birthday

That a friend can show up with a new car battery and help you install it;

That our interns graduate on to great schools, like Emerson & Penn State

We long to be a holy priesthood,
Lifting up our concerns to you,
To ask for an added bounty of your mercy,
That you offer without hesitation.

Lifting up concerns:

For Rebecca and Steve, Lindsey & Joel's friends, who lost their son Corey to suicide;

For work environments not ever going back to what they were;

For more patience;

For our leaders;

For Baby Jack, home from the hospital, off oxygen, but so vulnerable to even the smallest cold;

For Heather's baby, Susan and Russell's relative, due to arrive in a couple of weeks;

For no one falling in Carol's nursing home, as they work to get the residents moving around more;

For those struggling with family conflict, with inventories of hurtful things to say and to keep from responding to;

For those working in the meat packing plants;

For Andrew Shutt, Donna's friend, who was airlifted to Boston after a car accident;

For Donny & Sue, Ethan Clements godparents, who both have Covid-19. They're at home, but feeling pretty poorly,

For our families, who are anxious about the future coming toward them as they see the reality of their jobs changing around them;

For Maggie & Flora, the Drake's moms, who are both doing better during the pandemic;

For residents of nursing homes and assisted living, who are so isolated;

For those dying without their families;

For those working in funeral homes, who aren't able to provide the kind of care they would want to provide;

For the students whose quality of education is simply going down;

Mothering God,
We pray for those who need your love
Including ourselves
Bent through the prism of your mighty calling
And the convoluted passages laid out by the pandemic,
So that we may see everyone as God's people
So that all may taste that God is Good. Amen.

[\[The Lord's Prayer\]](#)

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 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: Acts 7:55-60

[\[Acts 7:55-60 read for you\]](#)

But filled with the Holy Spirit, he gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. 'Look,' he said, 'I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!' But they covered their ears, and with a loud shout all rushed together against him. Then they dragged him out of the city and began to stone him; and the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul. While they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.' Then he knelt down and cried out in a loud voice, 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them.' When he had said this, he died.

Hymn: *Blessed Assurance*

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

Scripture Reading: 1 Peter 2:2-10

[\[1 Peter 2:2-10 read for you\]](#)

Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation— if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in scripture:

'See, I am laying in Zion a stone,
a cornerstone chosen and precious;
and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.'

To you then who believe, he is precious; but for those who do not believe,

'The stone that the builders rejected
has become the very head of the corner',

and

'A stone that makes them stumble,
and a rock that makes them fall.'

They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Once you were not a people,
but now you are God's people;
once you had not received mercy,
but now you have received mercy.

Reflection on the Scripture:

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

How have you tasted that the Lord is good?

I mean, church is cancelled. No one is going to be able to tell if you watched this video or not. Yet, God love you, here you are, attending church as best you can.

For me, it was a long way from the church of my childhood, to a curiosity that perhaps I was meant to be a preacher right out of college, to going to seminary in my late 40s. As someone who stood between the technologists who could make the computer hum and the marketing people who could sell hamburgers to vegans, I was really good at my job. I worked really hard at it, wanting to get promotions and raises, to be chosen, corporate royalty and set aside as someone special (1 Peter 2:9).

But here's the thing. I wanted to be chosen and set aside, but I didn't want anyone else to be chosen or set aside. When someone had a cool innovation or a way to solve a problem that was going to gain them some recognition, I wasn't exactly the head of the mob to throw stones, but I was definitely good at holding everyone's coat (Acts 7:58).

I mean I wasn't awful with it. I was just human. I wanted to be part of the inner circle and once I had clawed my way somewhere near the center, once I was special, I didn't really want too many other people being special. Or at least they had to meet my definition of special.

So when God showed up in my life, whispering in my ear, well, it was more like shouting, but I wasn't really paying attention. Shouting was probably the only way to get through to me. When God showed up and asked me if I thought God only wanted a part of me, I was staggered. All those people who gave me fancier titles and more money and a better office, those people definitely wanted only a part of me. They wanted the part that had a quick, sharp tongue, the part that could cut someone down, the part that would deny mercy to someone who had tried and failed. Because we're a results driven organization.

No one ever wanted the part that doubted. No one ever wanted the part that was afraid. No one ever wanted the part that was appalled by the mob turning on one of our colleagues. But God did. In fact, God insisted on it. I had to bring my whole self, the i-dotting, t-crossing, team-leading, revenue-generating woman who would work every hour in creation to make a deadline. I had to bring her, the woman who was increasingly exhausted and brittle. But I had to also bring the confused, doubting, frustrated, appalled, not sure how to speak up woman too. And that experience of bringing my whole self, that tasted good to me.

It tasted good to me that I could be a living stone being built into a spiritual house. I didn't have to figure out the design or whip a whole bunch of kids fresh out of college into building the house, working them 18 hours a day fueled by Red Bull and pizza. I didn't have to cannily assess the gifts of my team and defend them ruthlessly against others to build a spiritual home with a beta release in two months. The gifts I had been given could be just that, gifts. I didn't have to turn them into possessions,¹ possessions I could then wield to determine who was in and who was out. I didn't have to take those gifts and use them to punish others to make sure that me and my team came out on top, special and chosen.

Instead of being jostled by the crowd, and holding their coats so they could hurl stones at someone we had decided to scapegoat, I could stay centered in my

¹ Beverly Gaventa, "Fifth Sunday of Easter: 1 Peter 2:2-10" 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), 297.

own self. Look at the story of Stephen from today's reading from Acts. Of everyone in that story, he is the only one not displaced, he is the only one who stays in his spiritual home the whole time, even as he is killed.²

The reading from 1 Peter can sound like an "us against them." It can sound like you want to be on the inside, because then you get to say who's allowed in God's spiritual home. Over the past 2,000 years, Christianity has definitely taken far too many opportunities to say who should be stoned, who should do the stoning and who should hold the coats. We have taken too many of our great gifts and turned them into possessions that we jealously guarded against others.

But we've been thinking about this all wrong. When we are called out of darkness into light (1 Peter 2:9), we are not given a gift that our flawed human nature will convert to a possession that we must defend against all comers. No, we become a possession. We are owned by God. God will build us into a holy house, if we would just stop wriggling so much while we insist on being in charge. Pretty ordinary people become extraordinary once they accept that they belong to God, in their entirety.³

This pandemic is reminding us of how little we control. And that's driving us nuts. If nothing else, I want to control the shoppers in my Hannaford's, possible by ramming them with my shopping cart. But this pandemic is also reminding us of how *much* we control. We can control the amount of love we send out into the world. We can control how loudly we shout "We believe" with our actions, including when we just wait there with our shopping cart six feet away. We can show we believe. We can show we know we are chosen and special, set aside, which is the original meaning of "holy".⁴ And that tastes so good.

So let me ask, how have you tasted that the Lord is good?

Prayer of Dedication for the Gifts We've Been Given

[\[Let's pray together.\]](#)

Almighty God,
receive the gifts we bring in gratitude for your astounding goodness.
We offer our lives, in all the new found ways we have discovered to live them in a time of pandemic.
Make our lives to be an acceptable offering in union with our risen Lord,
who lives and reigns with you forever. **Amen.**

² Gaventa, 292.

³ William Barclay, *The Letters of James and Peter*. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976): 199.

⁴ Elmer G. Homrighausen, "The First Epistle of Peter: Exposition," in vol. 12 of *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, 1957), 102.

Hymn: *We Believe* by Newsboys

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

A Prayer to Send us Back Out into the World

[[Let's pray together](#). Thanks, Melanie, for being our Lay Leader this week!]

Mothering God,
Send us back out into the world
Ready to build our lives
Around the cornerstone that is Jesus.

Send us back out into the world
Ready to taste the goodness of God
In every breath we take.

Send us back out into the world
Ready to share the light of love
Shining through us
Like the flawless prisms we are,
Who can bend light into hope.
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, with each other and our former selves!]

Postlude: [We Believe by Steven Curtis Chapman](#)

[No lyrics, just let it help you gear up to return to the world.]

For those of you for whom Mother's Day is not complete without an *Ave Maria*, [here's Renée Fleming and her accompanist](#) recorded during the Covid-19 pandemic. I figured she isn't coming to our little church anytime soon, so we might as well include her here!

Here ends our worship, now let our service begin.



PRAYER LIST (5/10/20)

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.
- Luca, Amy's nephew, as his new treatment appears to be having effect
- 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.
- 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 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 Rebecca and Steve, Lindsey & Joel's friends, who lost their son Corey to suicide;
- For work environments not ever going back to what they were;
- For more patience;
- For our leaders;
- For Baby Jack, home from the hospital, off oxygen, but so vulnerable to even the smallest cold;
- For Heather's baby, Susan and Russell's relative, due to arrive in a couple of weeks;
- For no one falling in Carol's nursing home, as they work to get the residents moving around more;
- For those struggling with family conflict, with inventories of hurtful things to say and to keep from responding to;
- For those working in the meat packing plants;
- For Andrew Shutt, Donna's friend, who was airlifted to Boston after a car accident;
- For Donny & Sue, Ethan Clements godparents, who both have Covid-19. They're at home, but feeling pretty poorly,

- For our families, who are anxious about the future coming toward them as they see the reality of their jobs changing around them;
- For residents of nursing homes and assisted living, who are so isolated;
- For those dying without their families;
- For those working in funeral homes, who aren't able to provide the kind of care they would want to provide;
- For the students whose quality of education is simply going down;
- For those who have no one to pray for them, accept our prayers;
- Individuals serving in our military & their families

Household Prayer: Morning

Lord Jesus, as I serve you this day, let not my heart be troubled. Help me to believe with conviction that you are with me, and I am in you, and you are in God. Amen.

Household Prayer: Evening

Faithful God, my rock and my fortress, into your hands I commit my spirit. As darkness falls, let your face shine upon your servant, and keep me in your steadfast love. Amen.

Questions for Reflection

Is the “dwelling place” (John 14:1–14) of which Jesus speaks a place for us after we die, or does it include our life in the present? What does Jesus mean when he says that his disciples “will do greater works”? What does it mean to pray “in Jesus’ name”?

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:

Outreach Invitation to Send Thanks into the Community

As we practice social distancing and working from our homes, there are many people who are leaving their homes to do the jobs that help ensure our safety, health & wellbeing. Some of these people are those who work in health care, our Brookline emergency services and local grocery stores.

Outreach is inviting the congregation to join us in writing appreciation and thank you notes to honor these people and let them know we are thinking of them. We are currently addressing Brookline's Fire, Police, Ambulance Departments and CERT (Community Emergency Response Team), along with St Joseph's Hospital, Southern NH Medical Center and our local grocery stores.

Instructions:

- Write one note or several - on cards, pieces of paper or any other creative idea you can think of
- You can write to a specific Brookline Dept, Hospital, Store (Market Basket or Shaw's) or write a generally-addressed note that Outreach will send where needed
- Sign with your first name & Brookline Community Church
- Drop off in the box located at the side door of the church by May 8th. If that is not convenient please contact Amy at arazz3914@gmail.com.

If you have any questions, feel free to contact Amy by email.

Thank you for your support to our community during this difficult time.

Help Lines

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

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. This week, like last week, they're looking for:

1. Plastic Bins. We need about 20. They should be short (low sides around 2" to 4" tall) 10" to 12" x 18" to 24" (or in that range).
2. We need someone to swing by the Food Pantry on Tues or Thurs to pick up all the empty boxes and bring them to the transfer station to be recycled.
3. From the shopping list:

Egg Noodles	Cleaning Supplies
Tissues	Olive Oil
Cat Litter	
4. For the Fridge and Freezer

Eggs	Foil Wrap
Ground Beef	Cranberry Juice
Butter	
5. Since we only have so much fridge and freezer space, Gift Cards for Market Basket and Shaw's are also helpful for us to purchase things as we need in the moment or to provide to clients.

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.

Covid-19 Information

Melanie, our state senator asked to pass along the following:

- 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>