



Brookline Community Church
Worshiping Apart
Reverend Catherine Merrill, Minister
May 17, 2020

The Sixth 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: [*Bless the Broken Road, A Rascal Flats Cover*](#) by The Piano Guys
[No lyrics, just let it help you get settled for worship]

Centering Ourselves for Worship:

[Join John Panto and Ann Desrochers, today's lay leaders, [in our centering prayer](#), a prayer for our nurses and other care takers, including ourselves.]

May there be for you a time to rest,
for the sake of you and not just so you can work harder.

May there be a time to laugh,
with colleagues and patients and those you love.

May there be a time to grieve,
and caregivers now and in months to come
to help you through
the great and terrible thorns of it.

May your feelings be honored,
your warning words and your wisdom words be heard,
and your actions bring results.

May others sweep the mistakes
of the well-meaning and the politically motivated
away from your path, so you can do
what needs to be done.

May the life that you have, this splendid gift
be protected by others
so you do not need to suture society
as well as do your own work.

May people who don't know, not pretend that they do.

May people know they cannot understand
what your families
are giving now and for years to come

May there be a memory of these months
stronger than car parades,
and more sustaining than free pizza
or the empty words of outsiders,

and may it sound like this —

“my parent, grandparent, friend, beloved
was a nurse during COVID-19
and I will never stop being proud,”

and even more like this —

“when I grow up, I want to become a nurse.” Amen.¹

Hymn: *Holy Spirit Dwell in Me*

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

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.](#)]

Loving God,

We pray for all who search for you:
may they find their way in you.

Bless us with lips that sing your praise
and lives that tell the stories of all that you have done for us.

Open our eyes to find you among us
as we share your love with others.

¹ Today's centering prayer was inspired in large part by Maren Tirabassi, "A Blessing for Nurses in a Season of Coronavirus," Gifts in Open Hands Blog, posted March 30, 2020, <https://giftsinopenhands.wordpress.com/2020/05/08/a-blessing-for-nurses/> (accessed March 31, 2020).

For that joy, and for the others you have given us, we pray:

For Samantha, Amy & George's daughter, graduating with her master's degree from UNH;

For delivering so many thank you notes out into our community, where they'll be passed on to those needing our thanks;

For Andrea, Barbara's daughter, being missed by her clients, so she's being brought back to work;

For Andrew Shutt, being moved to the pediatric wing where his mom can be with him, now that he's through the last of his surgeries;

For asparagus fresh from the garden;

For the delivery version of a Senior Luncheon that we offered on May 9th (even though it was SNOWING – I'll get over the snow eventually)

For golf opening up, hoping that walking the course will help lift a lot of moods;

For going camping up north (when it's not SNOWING – ok it may be a while before I'm over the snow in May)

For Elly & Pam Austen being at home, recovering from Covid-19;

For Judy Pease, who is recovering well from heart surgery in March;

We pray for all who are oppressed by governments or institutions:

for those whose voices are not heard or believed,

those with no one on their side.

Bless us with a joy for justice

and the strength to persevere as we work toward your coming realm.

We pray for all who hunger,

and those who worry each day how they will care for their families.

Bless us all with meaningful work and fill us with good things,

as we love and care for each other and find our sustenance in you.

Loving God, for all who are carrying concerns, including ourselves, we pray:

For Peter Fleming, Lisa Haight's long time friend, who died of a brain tumor;

For everyone to stay as healthy as they can in the days to come

For Lori, Barbara's daughter, moving her work as a nutritionist into areas that might complicate her own issues;

For the friends and family of Ahmaud Arbery, shot while jogging near Brunswick, GA, in an incident that reminded us of the lasting legacy of Jim Crow;

For Karen, Melanie's sister-in-law, who will be heading into long term care for Alzheimer's; Karen's only in her late 50s;

For the residents of *His Mansion*, who are continuing their recovery on site, even if they are not able to take on new residents;

For all those in recovery whose recovery is being complicated by Covid-19

For those struggling with injustice, hypocrisy and hurt to their families, all without responding in kind;

For the friends & families of those who have died alone;

For our church, that we remain patient with the process of re-opening;

For everyone, since we're all sick of being careful and being at home, but we need to keep being careful to keep the virus from spiking

We remember before you all who have died,
and pray for all who will die today,
that they may know your peace.
Bless us with the gift of faith,
that we may know you and love you,
and enjoy life eternal shared with you,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Let us pray as your Son taught us:

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

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.]

Hymn: *My Faith Looks Up to Thee* by Brent Vernon

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

My faith looks up to thee,
thou Lamb of Calvary,
Savior divine:
now hear me while I pray,
take all my guilt away,
O let me from this day
be wholly thine.

While life's dark maze I tread,
and griefs around me spread,
be thou my guide;
bid darkness turn to day,
wipe sorrow's tears away,
nor let me ever stray
from thee aside.

May thy rich grace impart
strength to my fainting heart,
my zeal inspire;
as thou hast died for me,
O may my love to thee
pure, warm, and changeless be,
a living fire.

Scripture Reading: John 14:15-21

[[John 14:15-21 read for you](#)]

'If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you for ever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

'I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.'

Reflection on the Scripture:

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

If you love me, you will keep my commandments (John 14:15) Jesus said. Today's reading is in the middle of his farewell address. He is with his disciples in that upper room. Before that Passover meal began, he washed their feet, an act of such tender submission and intimacy that they struggled to allow him to do it. That when he told them what his commandment was. *I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*' (John 13:34-35).

We have been keeping Jesus' commandment. We have been loving one another by staying apart. This is our tenth worship service where we did not meet face to face, where we did not greet each other, and sing together. I miss you all terribly. Preaching to an iPhone on an ironing board is just not the same as standing in our sanctuary and having you all respond to me with your smiling eyes and the occasional laugh or puzzled look. I miss having Jocelyn and Yifan play the piano as you try to keep up with my inability to stick with the published bulletin.

In last week's Cabinet meeting, we began talking about returning to in person worship. Of course much depends on Governor Sununu and his advisors. But we are also learning that it depends on us, on our individual decisions and on our decisions as a community. So I wanted to share my own thinking, a bit of what the Cabinet discussed last week and ask for your help.

In today's reading, Jesus says, *And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.* (John 14:16-17). What sustains us and underpins our life together is a reality that the world cannot discern. The world's ways of knowing and its criteria for evaluating what is real and important don't allow for such a divine presence as we know. So we can't expect the world to understand or value our way of loving Jesus and obeying his commandments.²

The love we are commanded to demonstrate shows up through human bodies. That love is more than a feeling, even a feeling of certainty about union with Christ. The love Jesus commands is about a master washing the feet of his disciples, about a king dying the death of a criminal.³ It is by the grace of God that we are permitted to gather visibly in this world to share in God's word and sacrament.⁴ Being together is how we support each other and how we remind each other of the love of God which we know and the world does not.

But to come to that knowledge, we had to change. The world argues that accomplishment fills up an empty life. Seek after prestige and pleasure, desire fortune, drive for worldly power and you will be satisfied.⁵ Knowing Christ meant

² Charles Cousar, "Sixth Sunday of Easter: John 14:15-21" 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), 308.

³ Linda Lee Clader, "Sixth Sunday of Easter, Homiletical Perspective, John 14:15-21" 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], 495.

⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, quoted in Joseph S. Harvard, "Preaching the Easter Texts: Can I Get a Witness?." *Journal for Preachers* 37, no. 3 (2014): 10.

⁵ J. Lanier Burns, "John 14:1-27: The Comfort of God's Presence." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 172, no. 687 (2015): 314.

we had to change, we had to let that go as our primary focus. So we may need to change further to remain faithful to Jesus' command to love each other.

As I think about returning to in person worship, there are a few key principles. I don't want to set ourselves up to turn someone away. Not only does that mean we need to be allowed to have 50 or so folks gather in person, that also means that the on-line worship services have to continue in parallel. Because until there is a widely available vaccine, some folks are simply not going to be able to attend in person worship. I will continue to need help from you all to make both kinds of services possible.

And I will be wrestling with a personal challenge. Given that my parents are both almost 80 and have underlying conditions that make them more vulnerable, I face a reality that seeing all of you every week in person means that I can never see them. I know that no one is asking me to make that decision, not my parents, not you, so we'll figure it out. I love my job as the minister of this church. And I love my parents. I'm sure there's a way to make it work.

No matter how we adapt in person worship, we have to face a reality that by gathering together we can unwittingly make someone ill, perhaps seriously. We have some guidelines about how to reduce the risk, staying six feet apart, wearing masks, etc. But we don't have a whole lot of experience yet with this virus. The choir that met one last time for rehearsal in Washington State in March did everything right, at least as they knew back then. And yet 45 of 60 of them caught it from an asymptomatic carrier.⁶ Still, waiting until we have perfect knowledge of the virus is like waiting until we have perfect knowledge of God.

This is a complicated, hard issue for us to figure out. Fortunately, Jesus has promised us an Advocate, a *paraclete* is the word in Greek. A *paraclete* was a professional who was called in when things were extremely complicated, legally, technically, emotionally.⁷ Jesus has assured us that the Holy Spirit is with us, here to help us with the complexity of obeying Jesus' commandment to love one another in a world that does not recognize that commandment. The Holy Spirit helps us deal with the challenges of showing a love that means bodies need to be near each other, at a time when those breathing bodies need to be spread apart.

So I would ask you to call on the Holy Spirit over the next few weeks in your prayers. I would ask you to pray and reflect on what we are called to do as a community in this time of contradiction. How do we deepen our connection as a community when we have to stay apart, because some significant portion of our

⁶ Erin Bromage, "The Risks – Know Them – Avoid Them", Erin Bromage: Covid-19 Musings Blog, entry posted May 6, 2020, <https://www.erinbromage.com/post/the-risks-know-them-avoid-them> (accessed May 15, 2020).

⁷ William Barclay, *The Gospel of John*. Vol. 1. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975), 166-167.

community will have to stay apart for a long, long time? How do we change what we are doing now so that it is more satisfying? How do we change what we are doing now to better show our obedience to Jesus' commandment to love? How do we, a small church with no expertise and scant resources, figure out the logistical tasks we need to attempt in person worship? Once we have a task list, how do we know that we have a good enough list that we should move forward with trying to accomplish that list? How sustainable does the effort have to be, given that the church is so reliant on volunteers to contribute their labor to the effort? How do we counter the natural impulse to say, this is too hard to figure out, so never mind?

We need to enter into a time of discernment, deep discernment, to figure this out. We will doubtless go more slowly than some would like, and too quickly for others. We'll probably start small. And we'll have to pace ourselves because we are such a small church and the changes the virus requires are considerable. But all of it, the discernment, the small start, the big changes are how we love each other. Not only will we be loving each other, we'll be showing the world, that community that does not know God, how God's love shows up in the time of pandemic. And we will try our very best to assist God in making sure that no one will be left orphaned (John 14:18), no one will be left without a church family to come home to.

Prayer of Dedication for the Gifts We've Been Given

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

Loving God,
You have given us many gifts:
life and breath and all that is.
In gratitude, we offer our gifts in return
for the goodness and grace of God in Christ.

We thank you
that you have placed in the hearts of your faithful people
the gift of generosity and the desire to keep your commands.
Bless these gifts and use them and us
to reveal to all tribes, nations, and peoples
your love in Jesus Christ.

Hymn: *Great is Thy Faithfulness* by Chris Rice

[\[Click here\]](#) 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, John & Ann, for being our Lay Leaders this week!]

Loving God,
Send us back out into the world
Ready to keep your commandments
To serve and heal the world.

Send us back out into the world
Ready to defend the laughter and grief of others
Knowing that we cannot understand what they have been through.

Send us back out into the world
Ready to sweep mistakes out of the way
Ready to protect the lives of others
Ready to share our pride in what our community has done

Send us back out into the world
That we are wholly unready for
To share your love with everyone
Simply because it was shared with us.

[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: [Where Shepherds Lately Knelt](#)

[Lyrics that you can sing with or ignore; either way let it help you gear up to return to the world.]

Here ends our worship, now let our service begin.



PRAYER LIST (5/17/20)

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 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, that they might find safe havens.
- 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 Baby Jack, home from the hospital, off oxygen, but so vulnerable to even the smallest cold;
- For Peter Fleming, Lisa Haight's long time friend, who died of a brain tumor;
- For everyone to stay as healthy as they can in the days to come
- For Lori, Barbara's daughter, moving her work as a nutritionist into areas that might complicate her own issues;
- For the friends and family of Ahmaud Arbery, shot while jogging near Brunswick, GA, in an incident that reminded us of the lasting legacy of Jim Crow;
- For Karen, Melanie's sister-in-law, who will be heading into long term care for Alzheimer's; Karen's only in her late 50s;
- For the residents of *His Mansion*, who are continuing their recovery on site, even if they are not able to take on new residents;
- For all those in recovery whose recovery is being complicated by Covid-19
- For those struggling with injustice, hypocrisy and hurt to their families, all without responding in kind;
- For the friends & families of those who have died alone;
- For our church, that we remain patient with the process of re-opening;
- For everyone, since we're all sick of being careful and being at home, but we need to keep being careful to keep the virus from spiking
- For those who have no one to pray for them, accept our prayers;
- Individuals serving in our military & their families

Household Prayer: Morning

I give thanks for the gift of life and breath that is mine today in Christ. Make me eager to do good and to resist evil, and grant me the wisdom to recognize the difference. Fill me with your assurance in all I say and do that I may share the hope that is within me in gentleness and reverence of Christ. Amen.

Household Prayer: Evening

O God in whom I live and move and have my being, you hear me when I cry and listen to my prayer; you set my feet on steady ground, you never leave me alone. As I rest in you tonight, sanctify my heart in Christ, and fill me with your strength, that I may rise to love and serve you and greet another day. Amen.

Questions for Reflection

According to the psalmist, God brought the people through trials, tests, burdens, and pain to a spacious place of life, breath, and salvation. God heard their prayers and opened them to deliverance. Where have you felt such a spacious place? What story do you tell of the ways that God is blessing you? What story does your faith community tell of the ways in which God is blessing them?

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 this 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 for forgiveness for failures/omissions, 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.

Consider asking God for guidance on deepening our connection as a community when we have to stay apart. How do we change what we are doing now so that it is more satisfying? How do we change what we are doing now to better show our obedience to Jesus' commandment to love? How do we figure out the logistical tasks we need to attempt in person worship? How do we know when the list is good enough? How sustainable does the effort have to be? How do we counter the natural impulse to say, this is too hard to figure out?

Announcements:

Please shop smile.amazon.com and choose Brookline Community Church as your charity to support the church. Thanks!

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. In addition to Market Basket gift cards, this week, they're looking for:

Dry cat food

Cat litter

Chips

Foil and Plastic Wrap

Popcorn

Spaghetti

Baby Formula (dry)

Egg Noodles

Razors

Chili

Soy Milk

Coconut Milk

Tissues

Perishables:

Chicken

Ground Beef/Turkey

Eggs

American and Cheddar Cheese

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>