



Brookline Community Church
Worshiping Apart
Reverend Catherine Merrill, Minister
August 23, 2020

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: [Blessed Assurance](#) by Yohan Kim

[An instrumental piece to help you get settled for worship]

Centering Ourselves for Worship:

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

God, Giver of Gifts
for those who mourn
friends and family, we pray.
For those who still in the hospital,
struggling for life, we pray.
For those bruised and hurting
and those who are so marked
by combating
the sudden roar of fear in their lives
they will never be the same, we pray.

And for others we pray.
We pray for small children who miss
their friends and their teachers,
and being out of the house,
never really understanding
why it has to be this way.

We pray for tourists,
who treasure seeing the cities
of other nations and their own,
tasting new food,
listening to cadence of
new languages,
and seeing beautiful sites,
for some of these will decide
never to travel beyond
screens in their own safe houses.

We pray for walkers
of all ages, all countries, all faiths,
all histories of the heart,
holding hands or shopping a little
among friends and strangers.

They love to wander so many places
and now wonder –
is this a street that makes
tomorrow's sweet memories
or the last place I was whole? Amen¹

Hymn: *Simple Gifts*

[[Click here](#) for a video that will give you the lyrics and someone to sing with, after a bit of a history lesson and an instrumental introduction.]

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.

¹ Today's opening and closing prayers were inspired by Maren Tirabassi, "A Prayer for Spain," Gifts in Open Hands Blog, posted August 18, 2017, <https://giftsinopenhands.wordpress.com/2017/08/18/prayer-for-spain/> (accessed August 17, 2020).

Lifting Up Our Joys & Concerns:

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

O God, Giver of Gifts,
Even from a place of exile,
from a position of despair,
from the time when pandemic is loose in the land,
we trust in your power:
to return and restore us,
to enliven and empower us,
to soothe and to save us.

You can turn a desert into Eden,
sorrow into joy,
and silence into singing.

You sing with us in our joys:

For granddaughters going off to college, starting a great new adventure at
a time when things are turned upside down;

For family birthdays, coming one after another;

For Bob and Linda Ashton's 50th Anniversary;

For having five uninterrupted days with a new grandson;

For getting to climb 4,000 footers along a ridge line

The heavens may vanish above
and the earth dissolve underneath,
but your salvation is forever.

You can turn a desert into Eden,
sorrow into joy,
and silence into singing.

You comfort us when our gifts seem to disappear under the weight of our
concerns:

For confusing regulations that are tricky to comply with;

For bureaucratic boxes which challenge our faithful response to life

The heavens may vanish above
and the earth dissolve underneath,
but your salvation is forever.

We wait for you, O God,
attentive and hopeful,
for with you,
deliverance is always possible.
In Christ, we pray. **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.]

Hymn: *We Were Strangers (One Body)* by Cathy Summers & Matt Osgood

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

Scripture Reading: Romans 12:1-8

[\[Romans 12:1-8 read for you\]](#)

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgement, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

Reflection on the Scripture:

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

Very early on in my computer career, I was given a project that had stalled. It was a retirement planner that was going to come out on 3.5" disks. It was back when dinosaurs roamed the earth. I got it done, working such crazy hours that I fell asleep during the car ride back from the pressing plant, where I went with the head of quality assurance with the master disks.

As a reward, I guess, I was given a much bigger project that had stalled and a team of four people to manage. The first project I had completed pretty much by brute force. But this one was going to have to be different. There was too much work, it was too complex. I had to rely on the folks who worked for me as well as 70 or so other engineers and designers to get it done.

Those four people who worked for me were really amazing. They had come from entry level positions around the organization, with very specific, very deep knowledge in their fields. They saw this assignment as their chance to move up in a big organization and they were going to do everything they could to take advantage of the chance they had been given.

But for that to happen, I had to stop doing what had made me successful in the previous project, and much of my career beforehand, and I had to rely on my team. And once I figured out my job was to remove as many obstacles from their paths as I could, I had to encourage, cajole, influence, finesse them into relying on each other and on me. Which is a stupid thing for an individual contributor to do in a hierarchical, competitive organization. But they did it. And by hard work and charm and a certain amount of collusion during demonstrations to the top brass of the company to keep the funding flowing at key junctures, we shipped that product too, although it shipped via the internet, back when the internet didn't *do* anything, just offered marketing materials, chat rooms and naughty pictures.

In today's reading from Romans, Paul says *Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds* (Romans 12:2). *Do not be conformed to this world* means don't change your external self while leaving the inside unchanged.² Think of your teenage self, you conformed to the world around you while your inside self was totally unsure of what it was doing. Or when you dress up for a special occasion, wearing clothes that aren't really you. It's that kind of external change. *But be transformed by the renewing of your minds* means to change your mindset,³ change your inner self,⁴ even as your external appearances don't change much at all.

That's what happened to me when I took over the team. My outer self didn't change, but my inner self, how I saw what my job was, completely changed. I think all of us have an experience where we realize that if we're going to get through it, we have to stop focusing on the outer and really rearrange what's inside us. We go into combat or become a parent or get a divorce or run for office or start collecting mountains and we realize that the way we look at the world is going to have to change if we are going to be able to meet the challenge in front of us.

I think Paul is building off that common human experience to get folks to see what is available to them as followers of Jesus Christ. This world that we are not supposed to conform to is a competitive, hierarchical, your-gain-is-my-loss kind

² William Barclay, *The Letter to the Romans*. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975), 157.

³ Beverly Gaventa, "Proper 16: Romans 12:1-8" 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), 457.

⁴ Barclay, 158.

of place. It's definitely dangerous to rely on other people because they routinely drop the ball. We can't even get them to wear masks. Small wonder it takes so many changes of our external self to just fit in so we can get on with what we're trying to do.

Paul wants us to take a big step back, a deep breath, and put that burden down. Renew our minds with the grace we have already been given and we'll find an amazing life waiting for us.

We are already holy, made so by Jesus Christ⁵ and the mercy of God (Romans 12:1). We have been given gifts by God, not least of which is the ability to discern the will of God. An all knowing, all loving God who is wide open to us understanding the divine intention for the world!?!⁶ We have been given a community made of all sorts of people, all with different gifts. No one is superfluous,⁷ we need all those gifts. And those gifts, prophecy, teaching, compassion, all those gifts are ones that we need a community to identify.

I firmly believe God gives all of us gifts. But when a talent, a skill, is God given, it's like a humongous, exquisitely cut diamond in a glass of water. We can't see it. Or we can see it and it's just so easy for us that we dismiss it as anything special. I can say now that I was a great manager, but I was terrible at teaching anyone how to manage. Because it was so intuitive to me that when people would ask me for advice in managing their own staff, I had to learn how to keep the eye roll out of my voice. "It's perfectly obvious what you should do ..." We need the community to say, "You know, you're really good at explaining stuff, you should do more of that." Because otherwise we literally dismiss the gifts we've been given by God.

When we use our gifts to help each other, when we rely on each other, we are living the life God is calling us to. We are the living sacrifices, the living offerings that Paul talks about (Romans 12:1). And the particularly cool thing is by living that life of gifts we've been given by God's grace, we don't have to sand off all the unique edges and ridges that make us who we are in order to conform to the hierarchical, competitive, I-got-mine-too-bad-for-you world we're surrounded by.

In fact, this reality is so awesome that Paul points out that we need to be chill about it. *Don't think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned* (Romans 12:3). Just 'cause God gave you a gift, don't get all big headed. Get out there and share the Good News, and teach and give and be

⁵ John Knox, "The Epistle to the Romans: Exegesis," vol. 9 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, 1954), 581.

⁶ Gaventa, 457.

⁷ Anders Nygren, *Commentary on Romans*. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1949), 423.

compassionate. Get on with the work. You've been given a gift from God. But so has everyone else. And if you have a little extra time on your hands, then help them develop their gifts.

Those two early projects in my career? I will always remember them, because they taught me about the power of transforming my mindset. Only much later, over drinks, did I find out that neither one was ever meant to ship. Both of those projects, indeed the whole team I was a part of, was meant to put in a great effort and show it couldn't be done. Because what we were doing was clearly impossible. So maybe the transformation Paul's talking about is the only way to get impossible things done. Maybe grace is what's needed to resolve all the impossible things we're facing in this world.

Hymn: *We All Have Gifts to Share* by Susan Kay Wyatts

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

Prayer of Dedication for the Gifts We've Been Given

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

O God, Giver of Gifts,
we thank you for the measure of faith
you have given to each of us.
Increase in us
generosity,
compassion,
and prophetic courage
so we may continue to be your body
in and for the world.
With thanksgiving,
we pray in the name of Christ. Amen.

A Prayer to Send us Back Out into the World

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

God, Giver of Gifts,
As we head back out into this coming week,
Help us to discover the gifts you have given us
In this time of pandemic.
More patience,
More creativity,
More attention to detail,
More gentle humor,
More skills in turning injustice into action.

Help us to remember more deeply that
Though we are many,
we are one body in Christ
and members of one another.

Help us to offer our gifts according to the grace we have been given,
as a living sacrifice to God, Giver of Gifts.

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: [Son of God, Son of Man](#) by Travis Ryan

[It looks like a Christmas song and it is, but it really works with today's service.]

Here ends our worship, now let our service begin.



PRAYER LIST (8/23/20)

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.

- Friends & family of Hazel Corey, Jerry King, Tre Rouse, Tasha Feller, Pat Tiner, Terry House and Rev. Tom Atherton.
- 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 everyone to stay as healthy as they can in the days to come
- For the friends & families of those who have died alone;
- For our church, that we remain patient with the process of re-opening;
- For confusing regulations that are tricky to comply with;
- For bureaucratic boxes which challenge our faithful response to life;
- For those who have no one to pray for them, accept our prayers;
- Individuals serving in our military & their families

Household Prayer: Morning

Loving God, thank you for the gift of this new day. You have blessed me in so many ways in days that have come before. Today I will look and listen for signs of your joy and gladness present in my life, in the lives of others, and in the beautiful world you garden. As I begin this day, I pray that you will strengthen my soul and that whatever your purpose for me will be fulfilled in faithfulness and love. In Christ's name I pray. Amen.

Household Prayer: Evening

God of my salvation, preserve anyone in danger this night; reach out to anyone who is in trouble. Give us the quiet rest that comes from knowing you are above everything, watching over us with steadfast love. I pray that today, in some word I spoke, in some act of care I offered, Christ was lifted up as Lord and Savior. Continue to transform me so that I may discern what you find good and acceptable and perfect. Help me to dream always your own vision of a world in full bloom, verdant with joy and gladness, teeming with thanksgiving and justice. At the close of this day, I entrust myself, and all those I love, to your care and keeping. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Questions for Reflection

In Romans 12:1–8, Paul urges us not to be conformed to the world's standards, but to be transformed and renewed by God's will. Is there an area of your life that is in need of transformation and renewal? Reflect and pray this week, asking God to show what God wills for you in this area of your life. Paul goes on to name a variety of gifts that members of the church have been given, all of which contribute to the overall functioning of the body (the church). Is there a gift in that list which you possess? Which one? How are you making use of that gift among God's people? Is there someone in your church or in your life who shares a particular gift of the Spirit faithfully? This week, offer a prayer of thanksgiving for that person and for any others who use their gifts to enhance your life or the life of your worshiping community.

Announcements:

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

The church's financial obligations continue. If you are able, please mail your offering to: Brookline Community Church, PO Box 507, Brookline, NH 03033.

	Actual Income	Actual Expenses	Income vs. Expenses +/-
July	\$42,784	\$48,975	(\$6,191)

Register to Vote

The Town of Brookline has put out guidelines on the variety of ways you can register to vote. You can certainly register to vote on election day, but to avoid standing in line, you can do it ahead, either in person or by mail.

For more information, see the information on the [town website](#).

Volunteer at the Polls

The polls for both the state primary on September 8 and the general election on November 3 need volunteers. If you are able to volunteer, in this time when so many of our neighbors cannot, please contact the Town Clerk/Tax Collector, Patricia Howard-Barnett at (603) 673-8855 x4 or patti@brooklinenh.us

Complete Your Census Form

You can help Brookline and NH get its share of federal resources as well as all the other goods and services driven by the census data. Make sure [you've filled out your census form!](#)

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

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.

Covid-19 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/>

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:

Butter and Margarine
Cheese
Bread
Tortillas
Jello
Pudding
Mayonnaise
Quick Oats Oatmeal
Cheese Crackers

Chips
Cookies
Juice and Juice Boxes
Cat Food (Dry and Wet)
Baking Soda
All Purpose Cleaner
Dish Soap
Paper Towels
Trash Bags

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.