



Brookline Community Church
Worshiping Apart
Reverend Catherine Merrill, Minister
September 13, 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: [Enchantment](#) by Marcus Hedenberg

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

Centering Ourselves for Worship¹:

[Join Bill & Nancy Dunbar, today's lay leaders, [in our centering prayer](#).]

Leader: In the twilight of the summer
as Autumn dances near

**All: Help us focus on your light,
and keep our purpose clear.**

Leader: As the days are getting shorter
and the foliage catches fire

**All: Let us see the magic balance
in the quieting of desire**

Leader: The newness may be fading
bright repose supplanting blooms

¹ Today's open and closing prayers were inspired by a poem by Jessica M. Folsom quoted by Maren Tirabassi, "In the twilight of the summer ... a prayer for autumn" Gifts in Open Hands Blog, posted September 19, 2017, <https://giftsinopenhands.wordpress.com/2017/09/19/in-the-twilight-of-the-summer-a-prayer-for-autumn/> (accessed September 5, 2020).

**All: A noisy bustle replaced by calm
while the cold and quiet looms**

Leader: Let us own this metamorphosis
and internalize earth's shift

**All: Remember now the peace of winter
and its silent restorative gift**

Leader: In the twilight of the summer,
as Autumn dances near

**All: May we appreciate the balance
and now listen, not just hear.
Amen.**

Hymn: *The Steadfast Love of the Lord Never Ceases*

[[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.](#)]

Let us pray to the Lord, saying,
Loving God, hear our prayer.

Loving God:

We pray for those who are sick or in trouble
Especially those with COVID-19,
Heal their disease, relieve their distress,
and return to them the joy of salvation.

Loving God, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for all who suffer the violence of war or natural disaster
Especially those in the refugee camps in Greece and Syria,
Bring an end to violence that destroys human flourishing;
help us to live in peace with our neighbor
and enable us to dwell in harmony with the earth.

Loving God, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for all those who are weighed down with concerns,
Especially

For Joseph, Susan Haight's cousin, who is in the ICU with a heart
condition that needs surgery;

For Louann and her mother, John Nicholson's friends, who are facing
challenges from a car accident and a transition between nursing homes;

For Scott, John Nicholson's in-law, who's having his sixth back surgery;

For the natural disasters which seem to be piling one on top of another this week, fires out West, floods in China and on the Nile, hurricanes and typhoons and the damage they leave behind;

For the pressure and uncertainty that is coming with the pandemic that is leaving so many of us so weary and so angry

Bring your healing presence a little closer to them this week
Loving God, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for those lifted up with joy
Especially

For Susan & Russell being able to watch the wedding of a cousin's daughter, even when they couldn't attend;

For a boat ride on the Boston Harbor and being able to celebrate with a new bride and groom right after their ceremony

Help us to celebrate the joys that surround us with each other and with you
Loving God, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for children
and for all who depend upon the support of others.
Protect the vulnerable, shelter the weak,
and give strength and wisdom to those who care for them.
Loving God, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for elected officials and for civil servants.
Stir up in them a desire for justice,
enable them to fulfill their responsibilities with integrity,
and drive from them any spirit of selfish gain.
Loving God, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for pastors, teachers,
and all the saints who lead your church.
Grant them wisdom to know your truth
and give them courage to live as faithful disciples of Jesus.
Loving God, **hear our prayer.**

Loving God, you have crowned us with
steadfast love and mercy.
Receive our prayers and help us to trust your goodness;
through Jesus 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: *He Taught Us to Love* by Jacob Hawkes

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

Scripture Reading: Romans 14:1-12

[[Romans 14:1-12 read for you](#)]

Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of quarrelling over opinions. Some believe in eating anything, while the weak eat only vegetables. Those who eat must not despise those who abstain, and those who abstain must not pass judgement on those who eat; for God has welcomed them. Who are you to pass judgement on servants of another? It is before their own lord that they stand or fall. And they will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make them stand.

Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike. Let all be fully convinced in their own minds. Those who observe the day, observe it in honor of the Lord. Also those who eat, eat in honor of the Lord, since they give thanks to God; while those who abstain, abstain in honor of the Lord and give thanks to God.

We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living.

Why do you pass judgement on your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgement seat of God. For it is written,

'As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me,
and every tongue shall give praise to God.'

So then, each of us will be accountable to God.

Reflection on the Scripture:

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

Today's reading from Romans was a hard one for me. I mean, I get the basic message: don't get all stressed out about the small details of living out your faith. Keep focused on the big picture. So long as everyone is honoring the Lord and giving thanks to God (Romans 14:6), just work with it.

The way Paul lays it out, those who are "weak" in faith (and who wants to be weak in faith?) are those who rely on a lot of guidelines to keep them on the straight and narrow. Those strong in faith don't need so many rules, they rely

more on God's grace. Those who are strong shouldn't bully the weak into giving up their guidelines. Those who are weak shouldn't look down on the strong for not having a more structured approach to their faith. And everyone should leave the judging to God.

I am aware of the irony of this message coming from Paul. He's pretty dedicated to telling a whole lot of people, strong and weak, exactly what they should do. And he doesn't seem averse to a bit of judgment now and again, when he thinks a church could use some. But perhaps because of that, I'll accept that he has a lot of experience in this area, so if he says to back off, I'll believe him.

The challenge I have with this whole passage is: where does it end? Who do I get to judge? Do I refrain from judging just the members of church I belong to? Other Christians? What about folks who I know aren't Christians, but have a deep faith of another tradition? What about the really committed atheists? Or when I don't know what their faith situation is, we just work together? Or we're part of the same political situation? Because there are folks who I know who would 100% say they're Christians and they do things I can in no way fit into any understanding of Christianity that I've ever heard of. This passage says I shouldn't judge people, but it seems to me there has to be a point where judging people and deciding I *definitely* do not want to be in any kind of fellowship with them is the only sane path to take.

Paul was writing to these churches in Rome to get them to help with the next step in his ministry. He wanted to bring Christ to the province of Spain. Paul had been shockingly successful in the eastern Mediterranean. Now he was being called to head to the western end. Where they had not heard of Jesus Christ. Where there were very few Jewish communities. Where they didn't speak Greek or Hebrew, two languages he spoke well. Where they didn't really speak Latin, a language he didn't speak all that well. Paul's whole process for sharing the Good News that had worked so well in Corinth and Ephesus and Galatia was not going to work at all in Spain. He needed the financial support and the contacts that the Roman congregations could offer him if he was going to have any hope of reaching the native people of Spain.

But more than that, the people who were native to Spain, not the Roman imperial hierarchy, all the carpet baggers and political appointees and soldiers there to keep trade flowing and the taxes rolling in, the people who were native to Spain were seen as barbarians. They were dismissed as uncivilized, uncultured, barely human. Just resources that needed to be harnessed if the Roman Empire was going to get the full value out of the territory.

Those were the people that Paul was being called to serve. They were completely different from Paul himself. And they were the people God was sending him to, to share that amazing reality that Jesus had shared with Paul all those years ago on that road to Damascus. Paul was being called to those

people, the ones who had been written off by everyone except for the value of their labor and the wealth of the land they worked. Paul wanted to tell them about Jesus Christ.

Paul wanted to tell the native people of Spain, *whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living.* (Romans 14:8-9) Christ died and rose in order to create community across the most fundamental of differences: Jew/Greek, slave/free, dead/living.² Christ is with us in life and in death, indeed, who else is with us in death?³ Paul wanted to bring that message to the people of Spain. He wanted to reassure them that there was no single person who was beyond the reach of Jesus' saving love.

And if he was going to bring that message to Spain, relying on the contacts and finances of the churches of Rome, then they needed to stop undercutting his message by saying that some people were somehow not going to be saved because they only ate vegetables or kept a different calendar. Because if life and death couldn't separate you from God's love, surely a slice of sirloin eaten on a Thursday afternoon couldn't separate you from Jesus' salvation. Paul wanted, Paul needed, the churches in Rome to start living out their beliefs.

I admit in this crazy political, Covid-19 year, I need to hear Paul's message. I need to hear and believe that nothing, nothing will separate me from the love of God, not in this crazy life or on the other side of death. And sure, to hear that message, I may also need to hear that I need to keep working on the truly biggest picture. That nothing separates me from the love of God and nothing separates the people I want nothing to do with from the love of God. And that I am the least qualified person to judge who is in and who is out. There is nothing more different from me than the love of God, and that is what I am counting on for my salvation. Perhaps the most sane thing I can do is to let go of my conviction that somehow I can keep myself separate from other people. Perhaps the most sane thing I can do is remember that we are all transformed by God's grace in the end into something redeemed by God.

Perhaps I can accept that my faith is weak or strong enough to believe that and live that way. Perhaps not. But maybe it's worth following Paul advice and seeing what happens when I do. When I stop struggling over who I'm allowed to judge. Because if God isn't drawing a circle to make insiders and outsiders, then

² Mary Hinkle Shore, "Commentary on the Second Reading: Romans 14:1-12", Working Preacher "Lectionary Commentaries for September 11, 2011, Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost", https://www.workingpreacher.org/wp_print_all.aspx?lectionary_calendar_id=217&print_type=comm&is_sp_anish=0 (accessed 18 April 2020)

³ 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), 622.

maybe I shouldn't be either. Maybe that will turn out to be easier than trying to figure out something I can't possibly determine. Amen.

Hymn: *Help Us Accept Each Other* by Becky Messer

[[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.](#)]

Loving God,
we thank you for the gifts we have been given,
in this time when the seasons change,
and time rides more heavily on our shoulders.
Multiply them, and enable the work of love
and the righteousness of your kingdom
 in the world
 in this time
 and in all time

We thank and praise you. **Amen.**

A Prayer to Send us Back Out into the World

[[Let's pray together.](#) Thanks, Bill & Nancy, for being our Lay Leaders this week!]

Leader: Loving God,
As we head back out into the coming week,

**All: Keep us focused on your light
Keep our purpose clear.**

Leader: Let us see the miracle that surrounds us
As the foliage catches fire

**All: As the blooms fade
And the calm and quiet of winter approach.**

Leader: As autumn begins,
Help us to truly listen,
To each other,
To the nature around us,
To you.

**All: Help us to listen, not just hear.
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: Together at the Cross by the Church Will Sing

[Let it help you gear up to return to the world.]

Here ends our worship, now let our service begin.



PRAYER LIST (9/13/20)

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 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 Joseph, Susan Haight's cousin, who is in the ICU with a heart condition that needs surgery;
- For Louann and her mother, John Nicholson's friends, who are facing challenges from a car accident and a transition between nursing homes;
- For Scott, John Nicholson's in-law, who's having his sixth back surgery;
- For the natural disasters which seem to be piling one on top of another this week, fires out West, floods in China and on the Nile, hurricanes and typhoons and the damage they leave behind;
- For the pressure and uncertainty that is coming with the pandemic that is leaving so many of us so weary and so angry
- 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 Christ, like the sun that fills the morning sky, you are the light that banishes the darkness of the world. Sun of Righteousness, arise in my heart, fill me with the radiance of your love, and display the light of your saving grace until I shine with the joy of life everlasting. Amen.*

*Inspired by Charles Wesley's hymn "Christ, Whose Glory Fills the Skies."

Household Prayer: Evening

God, forgive the sins I have this day committed and banish from my heart any self-righteousness that would withhold forgiveness of others. For you alone are the judge of human hearts, and your mercy is boundless. Amen.

Questions for Reflection

Why is my forgiveness of others so connected to God's forgiveness? Is every sin forgivable?

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.

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 +/-
August	\$68,133	\$55,214	\$12,919

Christmas Faire

There will be a Christmas Faire (or maybe this year we will have an Un-Faire??). Please email carolcherian@gmail.com if you are interested in participating or if you have ideas for this year's faire.

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 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, like last week, they're continuing to look for:

Hot Dogs	Juice (Apple, Cranberry, other fruits)
Cheddar Cheese	Coffee
Eggs	Flushable Wipes
Olive Oil	Foil Wrap
Cookies	Trash Bags
Pudding (cups or mix)	Sandwich and Freezer Bags
Cereal	Bleach
Pancake Syrup	Dry Cat Food
	Fresh Fruit -- Apples and Oranges

Also, a big thank you to mask makers who donated masks to the food pantry already. They have been a huge help for people. If anyone has more to donate, we are running low. We still have several kid masks, but could use more for adults.

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.