



Brookline Community Church
Worshiping Apart
Reverend Catherine Merrill, Minister
December 6, 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: [The Second Candle of Advent](#) by Ingenious6 Music

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

Centering Ourselves for Worship¹:

[Join Kevin & Jill Aitken, today's lay leaders, [in our centering prayer](#).]

Leader: Let us remember the words of Mary, as she offered her magnificent song of praise

All: And Mary said,

Leader: And like all new parents, she didn't really know what she was getting into, but she wanted to bring her baby into a peaceful world

All: And Mary said, God's mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.

¹ Today's open and closing prayers were inspired Mary's Song of Praise or *Magnificat* in Luke 1:46-55 and Sherri Dobbs Johnson, *The Africana Worship Book for Year B*, (Discipleship Resources, 2007, p. 25-26.) that appeared as the Advent prayer on the UMC's Discipleship Resources page for First Sunday of Advent, Year B - Liturgical Resources, <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/companys-coming/first-sunday-of-advent-year-b-lectionary-planning-notes/first-sunday-of-advent-year-b-liturgical-resources> (accessed 16 November 2020).

Leader: O the power of the Baby! Such power can melt the hardest heart. Let this be a Kodak moment reminding us of the impact of seemingly tiny gifts ... like crooked clay ash trays, popsicle crosses, stick figure pictures, wilted dandelions. All the gifts we gave as kids, all the gifts we raved about as adults.

All: And Mary said, God has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

Leader: O the power of the Baby! Let this be the moment when we truly understand that there are many ways to peace, not just strength of arms. Help us to let go of the pride that won't let us back off prideful decision we made before when we made a mistake.

All: And Mary said so many things. Let us ponder the power of the Baby in our hearts. Amen.

Lighting the Advent Wreath²

Several years ago Cláudio Carvalhaes, professor of worship at Union Theological Seminary, suggested that we lament before we light – naming those things which oppose or diminish hope, peace, joy and love. We name them and then claim the power of that light over them. Today's Advent wreath lighters are Marcia & Clarence Farwell and Alison & Clyde Ferrell. [Let us bring light to the darkness.](#)

Leader: In our homes, we gather around wreaths to pray our lost hopes, broken peace, limited joys, and love so hard to find and share, in this season of coronavirus. We affirm that our candles mean we claim the power to call this season Advent when God's light comes into the world and nothing can overcome it.

Lighter 1: We light the candle of hope. Its light projects our fervent prayers for 2021 that is healthier and safer than 2020 we have nearly completed. We hope when we return in the spring, our community will be on the road to normalcy.

Lighter 2: We now light the candle of peace mindful that recent months of remarkable challenges in our lives only mean that the hope and promise of Advent are more valuable than ever

Emmanuel, God be with us, in the week to come, lighting hope and peace on the wick of our lives so that we may shine on our world.
Amen

² The advent wreath lighting liturgy was inspired by Maren Tirabassi's "An Advent Wreath Ceremony for 2020," Gifts in Open Hands Blog, posted October 30, 2020, <https://giftsinopenhands.wordpress.com/2020/10/30/13204/> (accessed November 14, 2020).

Leader: God's peace illuminates the possibility of reconciliation and healing and brightens the path to joy.

Hymn: *Advent Wreath Prayers – Week 2* by Dave Frincke

[[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.](#)]

As heralds of God's good tidings,
let us lift up our voices with strength this day
praying to the One who comforts, restores, and heals.

Let us pray for all leaders and people of the world.
You have created one human family to live in
righteousness and peace.

Give us the wisdom to order our common life
according to your loving purposes,
that your glory may be revealed and all people shall
see it together.

Let us pray for your church.
You have given us the gift of the Messiah
so that your church may be steadfast and true.
Give us strength to follow your Son
until all have come to repentance and are reconciled
by his love.

Let us pray for those who are sick, who suffer need,
who are exiled or in danger.

Let us pray for those weighed down with concerns
For Grant, Bill & Nancy's grandson, who had to go back to the hospital for
more tests.

For Laura and her husband, Donna's cousins, they have both been
diagnosed with Covid-19 and Laura also has pneumonia

For Luca, Amy's nephew, who's going through a tough patch with his
treatment

For Janet, Carol's colleague, whose sister passed away the day before
Thanksgiving,

For Amy, whose husband and son had positive Covid tests and she's not
feeling so great either.

For Deb, Cindy's friend, who's been diagnosed with Covid

For Miriam's family, Sanjay's sister, who are flying to see his parents, may they all travel safely

For Ginette, Jill's aunt, who is working through a breast cancer diagnosis and a mysterious abdominal issue at the same time.

For the resolution of conflict in the most general sense, whether that is within our own selves, between families, within our country or between nations. May we get better at collecting all the angles and get better at seeing other people's tender spots.

For the fellowship of this church which may diminish without care as we go through another round of social distancing

You have made us for a holy purpose,
to comfort and care for each other.
Give us compassion to love our neighbor
and patience to care for those in need.

Let us pray for those lifted up with joys,
For Donna's dad, who's doing well, as he adjusts to his new life

For going into peppermint ice cream season in the grocery stores

When we pray for peace, we invite joy,
For peace makes joys more apparent
and us more able to respond to others with joy.

Let us pray for your creation.
Your faithfulness springs up from the ground,
and your goodness looks down from the sky.
Rid us of the laziness and greed that diminish life
as you teach us to care for your creation together.

Let us remember those who have died.
Ever-living God,
one day in your presence is like a thousand years,
and a thousand years are like one day.
Make us one with the saints,
who have found their eternal home in you,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. **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: *Make Straight in the Desert a Highway* by Austin Lovelace

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

Sacrament of Communion³

Invitation to the Table

Leader: The story is told that during the Blitz in World War II Britain, when the city was strafed and bombed, Operation Pied Piper evacuated many children to the country, but some remained in London and many of those were orphans. Some were sheltered in a Jesuit order of brothers, who noticed the children had trouble falling asleep or staying asleep, night after night. When the children were being put to bed one night, one of the brothers guessed the children's problem was that they were anxious because of uncertainty in their lives, and gave each child a small piece of bread, so they would hold the certainty of their breakfast all night and be comforted.

Come, to be comforted
in the story of Bethlehem,
and in this the House of Bread.
Come to be comforted at this table
by a handful of bread
and a cup of love,
that will stay with you always.

Words of Remembering

Leader: O, we remember God's promises of Emmanuel, and a branch of Jesse's root, of Leader, Wisdom, Monarch, Key of all that is locked, and Dawn of every morning.

And we remember the sacred story, that happened in the House of Bread for a new mother and a fostering father, sheep and shepherds, a few wise travelers with gifts and many, many angels.

And we remember that the baby named Jesus, grew up to heal people, and teach them with strange parables, that made people angry.

³ The communion liturgy was inspired by Maren Tirabassi's "Holy Communion Liturgy for the Second Sunday in Advent, the Sunday of Peace," Gifts in Open Hands Blog, posted November 27, 2020, <https://giftsinopenhands.wordpress.com/2020/11/27/holy-communion-liturgy-for-the-second-sunday-in-advent-the-sunday-of-peace/> (accessed November 30, 2020).

At Passover he broke unleavened bread, and poured wine and love freely. That all may live in peace, and be comforted, and be led in peace, and also hope and joy and love, with all the world.

Prayer of Consecration

Leader: Emmanuel, God with us, in our lonely nights, under our guiding stars, with the hopes and fears of all our years,

All: we come for comfort, for peace of mind and peace on earth,

Leader: for a blessing on our hands and the bread in them, on our lips and the cup we lift to it.

All: May this bread and cup be your holy Life, that we may ponder in our hearts, and pray in our community

Leader: that your comfort and your bread and love be widely shared.

Sharing of the Elements

Leader: The Holy Child of Bethlehem descends to us,

All: and is born in us in these days.

Leader: Let us share the bread.

Leader: We hear the Christmas angels their great glad tidings tell.

All: Let us drink deeply, Christ abides with us.

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Leader: God, we give you thanks that you have come to us

All: in the child of Bethlehem, in this bread and cup,

Leader: and in your answer to all of our hopes and your offer of peace, deeper than any truce,

All: truer than the upheaval that surrounds us.

Leader: You have comforted us with your promise and your presence

All: so that we too may spread the welcome wings of your good tidings. Amen.

Hymn: *O Little Town (The Glory of Christmas)* by Matt Redman

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

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 40:1-11

[Isaiah 40:1-11 [read for you](#)]

Comfort, O comfort my people,
says your God.

Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
and cry to her

that she has served her term,
that her penalty is paid,

that she has received from the LORD's hand
double for all her sins.

A voice cries out:

'In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD,
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.
Every valley shall be lifted up,
and every mountain and hill be made low;
the uneven ground shall become level,
and the rough places a plain.
Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed,
and all people shall see it together,
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.'

A voice says, 'Cry out!'

And I said, 'What shall I cry?'
All people are grass,
their constancy is like the flower of the field.
The grass withers, the flower fades,
when the breath of the LORD blows upon it;
surely the people are grass.
The grass withers, the flower fades;
but the word of our God will stand for ever.
Get you up to a high mountain,
O Zion, herald of good tidings;
lift up your voice with strength,
O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings,
lift it up, do not fear;
say to the cities of Judah,
'Here is your God!'
See, the LORD GOD comes with might,
and his arm rules for him;
his reward is with him,
and his recompense before him.
He will feed his flock like a shepherd;
he will gather the lambs in his arms,
and carry them in his bosom,
and gently lead the mother sheep.

Reflection on the Scripture:

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

Comfort, O comfort my people God says to the divine court at the beginning of today's reading (Isaiah 40:1). It has been 150 years or so since the people of Israel have heard from their God. The silence is broken by the order to comfort the people.

And yet, on its face, I don't see a lot of comfort here. I don't see any mac and cheese, or trashy romance novels to read on a Saturday afternoon. I don't see music that gets you jamming or a perfect martini by the fire or a long warm hug that you relax into. I don't hear a text coming through from a friend who's just thinking of you. Still the comfort is there, right there, if you look for it.

Comfort comes in so many forms in this one passage.⁴ Comfort *my people*, God says. They are a people who have gone astray, who took God for granted, who decided that they could control the world, that they need not depend on each other or on God. They were a people who decided that no matter what they did, God would back their play. And they have spent the last seven generations in exile and in despair, waiting to hear God's voice again. And when they do, God calls them "my people." God judged them and sent them into exile. But now that the judgment is over, God still calls them "my people."

God demands that the angels *speak tenderly to Jerusalem* (Isaiah 40:2). We ourselves are living through a period when people are speaking less and less tenderly to each other. So we know what a comfort it is when we don't use words to tear into each other.

God comforts the exiles by confirming that not only is their punishment over, but their penalty, their debt, is paid (Isaiah 40:2). It isn't that they have done all the work they needed to do to pay off the debt, they are too deeply indebted to God for that to be possible. God is forgiving the debt all together

God comforts the exiles by sending them out to share the good news with the cities of Judah (Isaiah 40:9). The exiles not only get the good news themselves, God has returned, the long silence is over, but they are the ones who will bring the good news to everyone else. We all know that feeling, when you get to share good news with others, even when it isn't your news to begin with.

God is definitely coming. In the ancient Middle East, one of the key reasons to build a highway was for a ruler to process with his god.⁵ You built the road to have a procession, so everyone could see how powerful the people were because they had such a powerful God. In this passage, God is not going to go from town to town like a conquering army. God is going through the desert where life is tough and people struggle to keep it together. All the difficulties of the journey will be eased, *every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain* (Isaiah 40:4). What a great comfort that is.

⁴ The different forms of comfort come from Elna K. Solvang's compelling article, "First Reading: Commentary on Isaiah 40:1-11", Working Preacher "Lectionary Commentaries for December 4, 2011, Second Sunday of Advent", <https://www.workingpreacher.org/?print-all=32521%2C32525%2C32524%2C32523> (accessed 1 December 2020).

⁵ Walter Brueggemann, *Isaiah 40-66*. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1988), 18.

Finally, God will be a part of their future. After generations with no one to stand up for them, God's mighty arm will rule (Isaiah 40:10). After generations with no one taking care of them, God will carry the lambs and the mother sheep to safety (Isaiah 40:11).

We are coming out of a time of exile. Yes, there will be some time still where we have to stay apart, but the vaccines are coming. Yes, there are miles in the desert that need to be prepared; we need to get from lab to arm. But just like it is easy to miss how many forms of comfort there are in the one proclamation in Isaiah, it is easy to miss the comfort we are offered and the comfort we can provide.

So stop for a moment this week, and look for comfort as you prepare for the long winter journey out of exile. Who is including you as part of "my people"? Who are you including? Who is speaking tenderly to you and whom are you speaking tenderly to? What debts have been forgiven and what debts are you forgiving? They don't need to be financial debts. What good news have you been told and who have you passed it on to? Where have the difficulties of the journey out of exile been smoothed out and where have you smoothed them out for others?

I'm not asking you to pretend to be God, because that would imply that God is merely some great summation of all the actions we humans take. We are grass and flowers (Isaiah 40:7), withering when our season has passed. But if we are to know that God is part of our future, then we have to see God in all the comfort we are offered that we wouldn't normally notice. We may fade away, but the word of God will stand forever (Isaiah 40:8) And one of the words we may not expect from God is *comfort*. So look for the hidden comforts that are attending your journey home from exile. Especially on this next part of the journey, through the desert, when we make the preparations for the way of God to be obvious to everyone who needs to lean on a strong arm or be carried by a Good Shepherd.

Hymn: *Comfort, Comfort All My People* by Koine

[[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.](#)]

Lord, we give you thanks that in the coming of Christ
your steadfast love and faithfulness have met
and your righteousness and peace have kissed.
May the gifts we offer this day lift up those in need
and prepare the way of your salvation. Amen.

A Prayer to Send us Back Out into the World

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

Leader: Let us remember the words of Mary and the power of the Baby. And Mary said, God's mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.

All: Jesus is coming and his coming will change the world. All we have to do is prepare the way, so Jesus' arrival will make clear God's mercy for those who justly fear the divine.

Leader: And Mary said, God has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

All: O the power of the Baby! The world was not prepared for Bethlehem or Golgotha. Nothing can prepare you for that. God enters the world in the most ordinary way possible and gives us the opportunity to head toward Bethlehem, to carry our cross to Golgotha.

Leader: And Mary said so many things. As we head back out into the coming week, let us ponder the power of the Baby in our hearts.

All: 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: [Make Straight the Way](#) by Lily Cruz

[No lyrics, but feel free to sing along and let it help you gear up to return to the world.]

Here ends our worship, now let our service begin.



PRAYER LIST (12/6/20)

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, Rev. Tom Atherton, June Hoff, Barbara Thaxter, Earl Bosquet.
- 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 Grant, Bill & Nancy's grandson, who had to go back to the hospital for more tests.
- For Laura and her husband, Donna's cousins, they have both been diagnosed with Covid-19 and Laura also has pneumonia
- For Janet, Carol's colleague, whose sister passed away the day before Thanksgiving,
- For Amy, whose husband and son had positive Covid tests and she's not feeling so great either.
- For Deb, Cindy's friend, who's been diagnosed with Covid
- For Miriam's family, Sanjay's sister, who are flying to see his parents, may they all travel safely
- For Ginette, Jill's aunt, who is working through a breast cancer diagnosis and a mysterious abdominal issue at the same time.
- For the resolution of conflict in the most general sense, whether that is within our own selves, between families, within our country or between nations. May we get better at collecting all the angles and get better at seeing other people's tender spots.
- For the fellowship of this church which may diminish without care as we go through another round of social distancing
- For those who have no one to pray for them, accept our prayers;
- Individuals serving in our military & their families

Household Prayer: Morning

Lord, how I love this season of new beginnings, the opportunity to turn toward you and start again. Empower me to be a messenger of good news, and a leveling influence along the way, as I seek to be one with you in smoothing out the rough places I encounter. Amen.

Household Prayer: Evening

Lord, you have comforted me throughout this day and rescued me from my exile. Where I have flourished, I give you thanks; where I have erred, I ask your forgiveness. Protect me through the night that I may rest in your realm of peace where righteousness makes a home. Amen.

Questions for Reflection

The prophet Isaiah announces good news: God comforts and strengthens a wearied and exiled people in preparation for their homeward journey. Mark's Gospel announces the good news of God in Jesus Christ: God comes to turn the world right side up and baptize us with the Holy Spirit. As we prepare to celebrate the birth of the Messiah, what is the beginning of God's good news in your life, and how will it change the way you approach this season of expectation and hope?

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 +/-
November	\$89,821	\$77,906	\$11,916

No Christmas Faire in 2020

But we are doing some fundraising to help replace the money it generates. We have delicious homemade strawberry and apricot jam that is available for sale now until it's gone (\$5/jar).

We have a Firepit Raffle "Basket" that we will be selling tickets for starting Sunday, Oct. 18 (if you can help sell some tickets that would be great!). Tickets are 1/\$5 or 5/\$20. One or two sale items and one or two other raffle items may be added soon. The raffle ticket drawing will be held on Sunday, December 6th. Please [email carolcherian@gmail.com](mailto:carolcherian@gmail.com) if you have any questions or are interested in helping out.

Christmas Blues Service

Jazz Sanctuary service at First Congregational Church, Concord will offer a Blues Christmas service for this year which has so many of singing the Blues. It will premiere on [their YouTube channel](#) on November 15th, and be available after that to stream and enjoy.

Holiday Lights Extravaganza in Brookline

The Brookline Women's Club and Parent Teacher Organization, with the support of Local Businesses and Members of the Community, have joined forces to present a socially distant Holiday Lights Display starting December 12th.

Together, homes and store fronts, will light up the chilly air with festive lights and holiday themed displays, for all of our local families to drive by and enjoy for free!

Want your display to be included in the Extravaganza? Visit www.bwc-nh.weebly.com or Brookline, NH PTO Facebook page to sign up!

Spreading the Christmas Spirit (& Helping Santa on his way)

After a tough year, folks are trying to safely share a little sparkle of magic, hope & togetherness. On Christmas Eve, at 6:00pm, head outside with a bell and ring it for two minutes. We'll be doing something together (and yet apart), and making sure Santa knows where to head next. Listen for the bells across your community. If someone would like to ring the church bell, let Rev. Cath know and we'll make sure you can get in the church.

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:

Cooking Oil	Bread
BBQ Sauce	Canned Chicken
Laundry Detergent	Canned Ham
Bleach	Paper Towels
Vinegar	Tissues
Coffee	Sandwich Bags (and other zipper bags)
Peanut Butter Crackers	Trash Bags
Pudding (cups or mix)	Baked Beans
Butter/Margarine	

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.