



Brookline Community Church

March 14, 2021

Reverend Catherine A. Merrill, Minister

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: [There is None Like You](#)

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

Centering Ourselves for Worship:¹

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

May the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you,
O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

It seems like it's been Lent for a year.

Is this what the exiled ones felt like?
taunted by "Sing us one of the songs of Zion?"
We've hung our harps,
unplugged our keyboards,
not touched the organ,

¹ Today's Centering Prayer and Prayer to Send Us Back out into the World were inspired by Pastor Evie Doyon, Green Mountain District Administrative Assistant and pastor at Northfield United Methodist Parish, VT in the UMC Daily Prayer from March 4, 2021.

silenced our choirs,
been away from our sanctuaries.
Here by the waters of Babylon,
we've wept.
When can we return?

Or are we more like the Israelites
finally released from captivity
but all we can think is
we were better off in Egypt
at least there we had food and drink
and things we were used to
and took for granted
and worshipped??

What is it you ask of us, God,
during Lent?

To return to you?
not "return to your buildings"
not "return to your old ways"
not "return to all the clutter"
not "return to what was"
but to return to you?
re-turn to you?
With all our hearts?
no attachments, no idols?

It's Lent
and it seems like it's been Lent for a year.
May the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you,
O LORD, my rock and my redeemer. Amen

Hymn: *God Will Make a Way* by Divine Hymns

[\[Click here\]](#) 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 and Concerns:

[Rev. Cath [sharing our joys and concerns.](#)]

Almighty God, through Jesus Christ you bring salvation to the world.

Give us strength to believe in him when we are lifted up with joy

Give us the strength to pray for the joys of others,

For Bentley staying overnight and being willing to share his junk food

For shooting skeet and other new hobbies

For our parents and our kids and grandkids getting their shots. Somehow it just feels better when the ones we love are getting protected.

For feeling better, when an injury isn't as bad as it might have been

Give us strength to share his joy with the world.

Give us strength to believe in him when we are weighed down with concerns,

Give us the strength to pray for the easing of the concerns of others

For Debbie, Linda's sister-in-law, who had her house split in two by a falling pine tree,

For Sanjay, needing some physical healing, after getting out of balance with his food and exercise,

For making sure those we love stay cautious between the first shot and the second + two weeks. We don't want anyone to trip in the last few yards of this marathon we've been running,

For some of the assumptions we've built our lives on, because they may not be as sound a foundation

Give us strength to share his concern for the world.

Give us strength to believe in him

that we may share in his victory over the power of death

and fulfill the purpose for which you have made us,

for he dwells with you and the Holy Spirit,

one God, forever and ever. **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: *Beneath the Cross* by Keith and Kristyn Getty

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

Scripture Reading: Numbers 21:4-9

[Numbers 21:4-9 [read for you](#)]

From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; but the people became impatient on the way. The people spoke against God and against Moses, 'Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we detest this miserable food.' Then the Lord sent poisonous serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many Israelites died. The people came to Moses and said, 'We have sinned by speaking against the Lord and against you; pray to the Lord to take away the serpents from us.' So Moses prayed for the people. And the Lord said to Moses, 'Make a poisonous serpent, and set it on a pole; and everyone who is bitten shall look at it and live.' So Moses made a serpent of bronze, and put it upon a pole; and whenever a serpent bit someone, that person would look at the serpent of bronze and live.

Reflection on the Scripture:

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

Honestly, I got nothing about looking at a bronze snake on a stick after being bitten by poisonous serpents. I know part of my gig is to bring the ancient text into the present day. But if you get bitten by a poisonous serpent, dial 911 and go to the emergency room.

Part of why I chose to explore this Scripture this week is because it seemed so crazy. Even if you weren't 100% up to speed on modern medicine, doesn't looking at a bronze image to heal a snake bite seem a bit like worshiping an idol? Especially if I tell you that later, when King Josiah was returning the religious observances at the Temple in Jerusalem to their roots, they decided to break the serpent into pieces (2 Kings 18:4). The bronze serpent even had a name, Nehushtan. I think when you name a sacred object, you're at least in the neighborhood of idolatry.

But the thing is, sitting 3,000 years and half a world away from the Israelites wandering for forty years in the wilderness, living in the desert, never able to settle down and grow their own food,² I don't think I'm going to be able to connect

² Shawn Zelig Aster, "'Bread of the Dungheap': Light on Num. 21:5 from the Tell Fekherye Inscription." *Vetus Testamentum* 61, no. 3 (2011): 352.

with the bronze serpent on the pole in an intellectual way. It's never going to make sense to me.

But does it make intellectual sense to have a bite of bread and a sip of grape juice every month in order to connect with a Passover meal 2,000 years ago? When the ancient Romans heard that the Christians were having a meal to eat the body and blood of Christ, the Romans were pretty sure they were hearing tales of cannibalism. For those of us who participate in communion, something happens there that can only happen there. We are welcomed at a table for no good reason. We are fed something for our own spiritual needs that we can get nowhere else, no matter how much bread and grape juice we come home from the grocery store with. We participate in sacraments regularly that violate scientific rationality and make us receptive to a pre-scientific way of looking at the world.³

So if I look at the story from Numbers that way, what do I see? I see a people tired of relying on God for things they thought they should be able to do themselves. For them, it was growing their own food. For me, oh, the list is so long. And isn't that the point? We don't want to trust God.⁴ We want to take care of ourselves. We don't like to think about being punished for sin, but the story in Numbers is laying out a clear connection between failing to trust in God and the snakes showing up. So maybe it's no wonder that we end up hip deep in snakes, real back then and metaphorical now.

Furthermore, once the people confess to Moses that they *sinned by speaking against the Lord* (Number 21:7), they ask God for forgiveness. And God forgives. The snakes are still there, but they are bearable.⁵ God lays out God's intention to heal the world.⁶ Only we need to act out our understanding that we do indeed trust God to be working to heal the world. Even when we are hip deep in snakes and not really able to focus on that lesson, because, you know, they're snakes and we're standing on a kitchen chair.⁷

So if we can catch a glimpse of God at work, even if it is while we're standing on a kitchen chair, can we set aside our technological reasonableness to notice one other thing? The world changed for God's people when Moses lifted up the

³ Walter Brueggemann, "Fourth Sunday of Lent: Numbers 21:4-9" in *Texts for Preaching: A Lectionary Commentary Based on the NRSV – Year B*, ed. Walter Brueggemann et al. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993), 223.

⁴ W. Eugene March, "Fourth Sunday in Lent, Theological Perspective, Numbers 21:4-9" in *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary, Year B, Volume 2*, ed. David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 100.

⁵ Elizabeth Webb, "First Reading: Commentary on Numbers 21:4-9", Working Preacher "Lectionary Commentaries for March 18, 2012, Fourth Sunday in Lent", <https://www.workingpreacher.org/?print-all=32612%2C32610%2C32609%2C32613> (accessed 3 January 2021).

⁶ Patrick J. Willson, "Snake on a Stick." *The Christian Century* 111, no. 7 (1994): 223.

⁷ Willson, 223.

bronze serpent on the pole. They could look at the pole and see, not a magical snake, but a reminder that God was with them in this desert with way too many poisonous snakes and way too many doubts. And then, sometime later, Jesus was lifted up on a cross. Whatever we see when we see the cross, it is a reminder that God is with us in this earthly life. It's an odd claim that this lifted-up One stands at the center of a redefined existence.⁸ Our lives are re-centered around something lifted up, something that speaks of death. In the end, this simple equation endures: the cure for snakes is a snake; the cure for human life is one man's life; the cure for death is death.⁹ Let us lift that up and look at it for salvation this Lent. Because science and medicine and kitchen chairs can all be seen as gifts of God, especially if we are willing to trust that God's intention is to heal the world.

Hymn: *Look and Live* by Kate Ayomide

[[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.](#)]

Merciful God, we thank you for your
wonderful works among humankind.
Accept our gifts with the dedication
of our lives
and help us be for the world an emblem
of your steadfast love,
in Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

A Prayer to Send us Back Out into the World

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

May the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you,
O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

As we head back out into the coming week,
It seems like it's been Lent for a year.

Mostly, we just want to know,
When can we return?
To the singing we miss,
To the hugging we miss,
To the restaurants we miss,
We're so tired of missing what's gone.

⁸ Brueggemann, 223.

⁹ Willson, 223.

And then we remember,
We can never return.
We've lost too many loved ones
to ever go back
to the things we were used to
and took for granted.

What is it you ask of us, God,
during Lent?

To return to you?

To let go of the assumption of going back

To let go of the presumption that what we had before was better than what is
here and now,

To let go of the pretense that such a huge loss isn't going to transform us,
whether we want to be transformed or not.

To just let go and
return to you?
re-turn to you?

It's Lent
and it seems like it's been Lent for a year.

May the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you,
O LORD, my rock and my redeemer. 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: [Way Maker](#) by Leeland

[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 (03/14/21)

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 and Dave Larkin.
- 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 Debbie, Linda's sister-in-law, who had her house split in two by a falling pine tree,
- For Sanjay, needing some physical healing, after getting out of balance with his food and exercise,
- For making sure those we love stay cautious between the first shot and the second + two weeks. We don't want anyone to trip in the last few yards of this marathon we've been running,
- For some of the assumptions we've built our lives on, because they may not be as sound a foundation
- For those who have no one to pray for them, accept our prayers;
- Individuals serving in our military & their families

Household Prayer: Morning¹⁰

Loving God, draw me to your light, that I may avoid the dangers of sin and receive the freedom of your grace in Jesus Christ. Amen.

Household Prayer: Evening

Lord Christ, as shadows of night draw near, sustain me by the light that banishes the fearful claim of death. Help me believe in you with all my heart that I may know the freedom of salvation and at last receive the joy of eternal life. Amen.

Questions for Reflection

Jesus asks his disciples to deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow him. What does the light of God's truth reveal about your life? Are there parts of your life that you want to hide from God? Can you imagine what it would be like to live completely transparent to God's piercing light?

Daily Awareness Reflection¹¹

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 ...

¹⁰ The Morning & Evening Prayer and Question for Reflection are reprinted by permission of Westminster John Knox Press from *Feasting on the Word® Worship Companion*. Copyright 2014.

¹¹ Elizabeth Liebert, *The Soul of Discernment* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2015), 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 +/-
February	\$18,520	\$14,242	\$4,277

All people age 65+ are now in Phase 1b for COVID-19 vaccine distribution.

Phase 1b began scheduling on January 22 at 8:00am. Vaccines for Phase 1b started on January 26. [Use this page to determine in what phase you belong](#) and for further directions.

The March/April edition of *The Upper Room* is available in the mail room, if you're looking for a printed daily Scripture reading and reflection to add to your spiritual practice.

Weekly Lenten Taize services:

Throughout Lent, the New England UMC is [posting Taize services weekly on Wednesday](#). The services tend to be very meditative, using simple and compelling chants. If you've never had a chance to go to a [Taize](#) service, you might find them moving, especially during Lent.



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/>

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 our community's needs.

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:

Pickles	Apple or Cranberry Juice
Parmesan	Paper Towels
Cookies/Cookie Mix	Coffee
Cheese Nip (or similar) Crackers	Disposable Razors
Jello/Gelatin (any flavors)	Dry Cat Food
Sardines	Dry Dog Food
Cereal (especially Raisin Bran or "Fun" Cereals)	Dish Soap
	Zip-style 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.

Non-perishables can be dropped off at Brookline Town Hall (downstairs near the Town Clerk's Office), at the Brookline Post Office, or at the Cozy Tae Cart any time those places are open.

As always, perishable items such as bread, cheese, butter, eggs, meats, and milk can be donated during open pantry hours: Tues and Thurs, 10am - 2pm.

Thank you for your continued support to our church and our community.