



*Brookline Community Church*

*March 21, 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:** [It is Well with My Soul](#) by Stonebriar Brass Choir

[An instrumental piece to help you get settled for worship. I'll never sing this hymn again without hearing this in my head.]

**Centering Ourselves for Worship:**<sup>1</sup>

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

Leader: God who does the making and saving,

**All: guide us in this difficult season.**

Leader: Even as we falter and fail,

**All: you offer us mercy and love.**

Leader: Help us to remember we were made for this time.

**All: Encourage us not to not avoid the struggle,**

Leader: but to walk toward the hurting places

**All: where we can be a blessing as you have blessed us.**

**Everyone: Amen.**

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<sup>1</sup> Today's Centering Prayer and Prayer to Send Us Back out into the World were inspired by Beth DiCocco, Conference Director of Communications in the UMC Daily Prayer from March 11, 2021.

## Lifting up Our Joys and Concerns:

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

Holy God who does the making and saving  
by the cross and resurrection of Jesus,  
you lift the suffering world toward hope  
and transformation  
and open the way to eternal salvation.

Lift our hearts with joy as we pray for the joys of others.

We pray

For Friday at the church, with Take-Home Meals, Girl Scouts in the parking lot, donations to Bridges piling up, it felt like a mini-event of kindness

For the increasing daylight that we've all been missing

For talking with the seniors as we get ready for the Senior Luncheon

For the door that opens in the darkness, allowing us to pray, even when it is one word, "please" "thanks" "trust" "love"

May we walk with joy in the way to eternal salvation.

Lift our hearts as we pray for those weighed down with concerns

We pray

For the family and friends of Ginny Kerouac, former resident of Brookline and Nancy's friend, who passed away March 3rd,

For Xander, Ann & John's grandson, who has a persistent cough that's not clearing up

For Lori, Ann's sister-in-law, who's through an aggressive radiation treatment and is heading for an aggressive chemotherapy regime

For the hope that we can hold onto the gentleness and kindness that the pandemic highlighted the need for

For maintaining a compass heading when we're being pulled off course

We ask that you come closer to them in their time of struggle  
and transform their concerns so they can more readily  
remember their eternal salvation through you.

As we move ever closer to the passion of Christ,  
may your law of love be written on our hearts  
as he draws all people to himself revealing  
your love for the world. **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](mailto:minister@bccnh.org) or call/text (978) 494-6953.]

## **Hymn: *Change My Heart Oh God* by Maranatha! Music**

[\[Click here\]](#) 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.]

## **Scripture Reading: Jeremiah 31:31-34**

[Jeremiah 31:31-34 [read for you](#)]

The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, 'Know the LORD', for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

## **Reflection on the Scripture:**

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

We've made it through five weeks of Lent and we are ready. We've made it through more than 50 weeks of pandemic and we are ready. We're ready to get to the other side. It won't be "back" to normal. Fine. We realize and accept that. It will be "forward" to normal. Or something. But we're ready for it not to be this.

And Jeremiah, who has been breaking pottery and wailing in the court of the King, trying to get people's attention, is saying, "Finally." "Finally, they're ready." Because God has been long since ready to forgive us and start again.

For all that God is declaring a new covenant with us, there's a lot of the old covenant that still applies.<sup>2</sup> The new covenant is still between God and God's people. It's initiated by God. It's rooted in a divine act of redemption. It involved

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<sup>2</sup> Werner E. Lemke, "Jeremiah 31:31-34." *Interpretation* 37, no. 2 (1983): 186.

the revelation of God's will through precepts and commandments, what is known as torah. Its goal is to establish an intimate and exclusive relationship between God and God's people.

Sure, some things are different.<sup>3</sup> The new covenant will be more internalized and immediate. Fewer intermediaries, like me, saying, "here let me tell you what the word of God means." The knowledge of God will be more widespread, available to all from the least to the greatest (Jeremiah 31:34), no special training required. The redemption it offers is less about the bondage of political oppression and more about freedom from human sin, although the two are entwined.

God forgives God's people who have completely dropped the ball on the first covenant. Because the language in Jeremiah echoes the language in Deuteronomy, it appears the old covenant is the one announced at Sinai, with the stone tablets. God's people complained about that pretty much from the beginning, resisting that one the whole way.<sup>4</sup> So this new one is going to be written on our hearts, it's going to be built in, part of the base model. Irresistible.

But that new start comes *because* God forgives us. In Jeremiah 31:34, God says, through Jeremiah, *for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more*. That "for," in the underlying Hebrew, means "because."<sup>5</sup> This whole new, irresistible start, comes *because* God forgives.

It's Lent, it's a pandemic. We know that there is plenty to forgive. We said we were clear on the commandments. We've carved them into marble in rotundas we walk through and pause to admire the words.<sup>6</sup> But we're still killing each other. In day spas and massage parlors in Atlanta. In nursing homes. In a warming planet.

And yet, there is God, knowing that we cannot make the transformation ourselves. Our human will is simply not up to the task. The first covenant proved that. God offers us pure grace. The hope of the transformation comes from God as a free gift.<sup>7</sup> God is leading us always in the same direction, if only we would be ready for it. God is always leading us toward relationship. God is transforming us, if we are only willing to enter into a loving relationship. Once we are ready to stop closing a relationship with someone because they are Asian or old or half a world away on an island a foot above sea level. When we don't opt

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<sup>3</sup> Lemke, 186.

<sup>4</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *To Build, To Plant: A Commentary on Jeremiah 26-52*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1991), 71.

<sup>5</sup> Brueggemann, 72.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Floyd, "Fifth Sunday of Lent, Pastoral Perspective, Jeremiah 31:31-34" 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), 124.

<sup>7</sup> Samuel K. Roberts, "Fifth Sunday of Lent, Theological Perspective, Jeremiah 31:31-34" 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), 126.

out because they are Republican or voted for Hilary or make their dogs wear bow ties. When we don't reject someone because they work for the Roman Empire or the Jewish authorities or the land owners. This year, this Holy Week, with all its stories from back then, listen with your pandemic ears right now. Your ears that are ready to hear something new. See how often Jesus asks someone to stop and re-enter relationship. What God is longing to write on our hearts is that commitment to relationship, with God and with each other.

We have spent five weeks, more than fifty weeks, getting ready. Ask yourself if you are ready yet. Are you really ready to hear the words of Jeremiah? We are most ready to hear these words when our own efforts are exhausted. When we are weary of our inner turmoil, we are ready to hear Jeremiah. When we are weary of broken relationships and the uncertainty of trusting others, we are ready to hear Jeremiah. When we are weary of our intermittent relationship with God, occasionally close but more likely far away, we are ready to hear Jeremiah. If we have tried to shake off a bad habit or we are tired of trying to improve ourselves, we are ready to hear Jeremiah.<sup>8</sup> Because God is ready. We just have to make space in our hearts for some new writing that God's grace will put there to transform us. And we sure are more than ready for that transformation to come.

**Hymn: *What Wondrous Love This Is* 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.](#)]

May God who does the making and saving,  
whose hand has written the law of love  
upon your heart,  
fill you with peace from deep within  
and the commitment to live in harmony.

May the gifts and offerings we share,  
Be a part of how we express our gratitude,  
For the opportunity to be made in your image,  
And saved by your grace. **Amen.**

**Hymn: *Breathe on Me, Breathe of God* by Steve Green**

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

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<sup>8</sup> Charles L. Aaron, Jr., "First Reading: Commentary on Jeremiah 31:31-34", Working Preacher "Lectionary Commentaries for March 29, 2009, Fifth Sunday in Lent", <https://www.workingpreacher.org/?print-all=31995%2C31994%2C31993%2C31996> (accessed 3 January 2021).

## **A Prayer to Send us Back Out into the World**

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

Leader: God who does the making and saving,

**All: we walk into a difficult season.**

Leader: We need your mercy and love,

**All: because we are all too likely to falter and fail.**

Leader: Help us to feel your presence in the coming week, when we're struggling.

**All: Struggling to remember we were made for this time.**

Leader: Work through us to show the blessing you offer to the world

**All: As you walk with us toward the hurting places.**

**Everyone: 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: [Nobody Loves Me Like You](#) by Chris Tomlin**

[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 (03/21/21)

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, 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 the family and friends of Ginny Kerouac, former resident of Brookline and Nancy's friend, who passed away March 3<sup>rd</sup>;
- For Xander, Ann & John's grandson, who has a persistent cough that's not clearing up;
- For Lori, Ann's sister-in-law, who's through an aggressive radiation treatment and is heading for an aggressive chemotherapy regime;
- For the hope that we can hold onto the gentleness and kindness that the pandemic highlighted the need for;
- For maintaining a compass heading when we're being pulled off course;
- For those who have no one to pray for them, accept our prayers;
- Individuals serving in our military & their families

### **Household Prayer: Morning<sup>9</sup>**

Loving God, you offer the gift of new life each day. Open my heart to receive this grace that I may be wholly yours, then give me the courage to share this gift wherever I go as I seek to walk in your way of mercy, forgiveness, and newness of life. Amen.

### **Household Prayer: Evening**

Forgiving God, who makes all things new, you know where I have flourished this day, and you know where I have failed. Help me to know that in all my challenges there is a seed of hope that enables me to more faithfully depend on you. May I rest in peace this night and awake refreshed to greet the newness of your day. Amen

### **Questions for Reflection**

God is at work offering forgiveness, showing mercy, and giving knowledge of life, death, and salvation. Where is God enacting that new life within or around you? What in your life must die so that you may flourish? What must fall away so that you can rise again in Christ?

### **Daily Awareness Reflection<sup>10</sup>**

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 ...

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<sup>9</sup> 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.

<sup>10</sup> Elizabeth Liebert, *The Soul of Discernment* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2015), 31.

## Announcements:

Please shop [smile.amazon.com](https://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 +/-
<b>February</b>	\$18,520	\$14,242	\$4,277

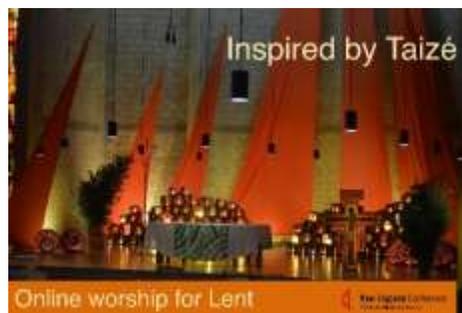
## All people age 65+ are now in Phase 1b for COVID-19 vaccine distribution.

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.



## Reflecting on the Past Year as Part of the Hillsborough Assn Mtg on 5/2:

The Hillsborough Association of the NH UCC will hold its annual meeting on May 2<sup>nd</sup>. They are looking for each church to offer a brief, two-minute reflection on the stories of our church family over the past year. If you are interested in doing this for us, I have a list of prompting questions that you might find useful.

## 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.