



Brookline Community Church

April 18, 2021

Reverend Catherine A. Merrill, Minister

Prelude: *This Is My Father's World* - [click here for video](#)

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

Centering Ourselves for Worship:¹

[Join four United Methodist missionaries, [in our centering prayer.](#)]

Lord, we knew we would find you in gardens.

We knew we would find you in water.

We knew we would find you on mountaintops.

We knew we would find you in wilderness.

But God, we never expected to find you in a trough.

...in a marketplace.

...among women.

...at dinner parties.

...on a cross.

We expected to find you in a tomb.

¹Today'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.

And we still struggle to believe we can find you in our midst.

We still struggle to believe that the matter of this world really matters to you.

Still, you show up in your physical body with messy wounds to eat a real meal in the material world.

You show up in a world that is degraded and scarred by the same forces that mocked and broke your body on the cross.

You show up preaching a word of repentance and forgiveness to those who are broken and to those who break.

Lord, we are the broken.

Lord, we are the ones who break.

Make us healers as you heal us.

Bind us in creaturely solidarity with you and with all of creation.

Impel us to permeate the world with justice, equity, sustainability and hope.

Join us in co-creating your kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

Amen.

Hymn: *For The Beauty Of The Earth*

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

Lifting up Our Joys and Concerns:

[Thank you, John Panto, for [sharing our joys and concerns](#).]

We thank you, creator God,
for the goodly heritage you offer us,
from green downland
to the deep salt seas,
and for the abundant world
we share with your creation.

We pray for those lifted up with Joys.

We pray for Jocelyn Aitken's strong ankles that her physical therapist said are doing a wonderful job of keeping her stable without any additional support.

We pray for the flowers that are starting to bloom and the promise of warmer weather they bring with them.

We pray for them knowing that we too will be lifted with joy.

Keep us so mindful of the world's needs
and the needs of all with whom we share the world.

We pray for those weighed down with concerns.
We pray for Daunte Wright and his family.

We pray for our country and our
people, may we learn to listen and understand each other.

We pray for Rev. Cath as she recuperates at home and prepares for her knee surgery, which is being rescheduled.

We pray that you bring your loving presence ever closer to them in their time of need.

We pray that, open to your Spirit,
we may discern and practice
all that makes for the world's wellbeing,
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
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 us your joys & concerns and we'll include them in our prayers: Barbara Haskell-Higgins at barbarajh@comcast.net.]

Hymn: *(Let All Things Now Living)*

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

Scripture Reading: Luke 24:36b-48

[Luke 24:36b-48 Read by Roland Fernandes, General Secretary of Global Ministries and UMCOR [read for you](#)]

While they were still talking, Jesus actually stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you." In their panic and fright, they thought they were seeing a ghost. Jesus said to them, "Why are you disturbed? Why do such ideas cross your mind? Look at my hands and my feet; it is I, really. Touch me and see—a ghost doesn't have flesh and bones as I do." After saying this, Jesus showed them the wounds. They were still incredulous for sheer joy and wonder, so Jesus said to them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" After being given a piece of cooked fish, the savior ate in their presence. Then Jesus said to them, "Remember the words I spoke when I was still with you: everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the psalms had to be fulfilled." Then Jesus opened their minds to the understanding of the scriptures, saying,

“That is why the scriptures say that the Messiah must suffer and rise from the dead on the third day. In the Messiah’s name, repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of all this.”

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

Reflection on the Scripture:

"Somewhere Better Than Here" A Reflection by Rev. Phillips [[Click here](#) for the video]

I recently read a story about a teenage boy, who, like so many teens, participated in virtual schooling. He lived in a mobile home community in a small trailer that housed a large, extended family. The community experienced common, difficult challenges rooted in systemic poverty and health problems exacerbated by pollution and environmental degradation.

The boy discovered an abandoned van on the outskirts of his town that became his own, cozy hideaway. He attended virtual school from the van. It gave him the chance to see other kids, connect with teachers, and absorb new ideas. The online experience was immersive, delivering him to other planets, landscapes and horizons. He could visit art museums, travel in space, go to the beach, talk with anyone in the world. School was an escape from the mundane struggles of his life, and he loved it.

This story wasn’t a news story about how one teen was coping amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Rather, it was the beginning of a science fiction novel published ten years ago called Ready Player One in which spending time in virtual worlds became the de facto strategy to cope with the suffering of the real world.

While the virtual worlds in the book were perhaps more immersive than ours, the basic premise felt all too familiar, particularly in the context of our current virtual lives. With activities limited by COVID restrictions, with challenging news all around, it is a normal, human response to look for a way out, an escape, another world on which to set one’s sights.

Humans have actually been trying to escape the suffering of this world, for a very long time. Indeed, yearning for escape from suffering seems to be tied to a primal awareness that there is something better out there. It connects with the Eden of our creation story--the lush garden where all our needs and most of our wants were met. But then, like now, the humans wanted to consume beyond the limits God set for creation. The story teaches that in breaching the boundaries of the garden, the humans set the stage for the struggle and suffering we’ve been trying to escape ever since.

Bible stories also offer a vision for long-term release from this world--a vision of heaven. It is described as God's house, a place of joy, shelter and sustenance. It's hard to get there, but oh, when you do, a glorious feast and heavenly host await, not to mention a lifetime in the presence of the Lord. These visions speak to the human yearning to leave suffering, sadness and pain behind, and to go somewhere better than here.

This longing is part of who we are. The Bible is filled with stories of migrations and dreams. Throughout history, religious traditions and movements have pointed us away from this life and toward visions of other lives in this world and the next. Dreams of departure can be as patriotic as a moon landing or as deadly as an attempt to catch a ride on the Hale-Bopp comet. Many real estate agents would be happy to lead you toward a better life locked in the nearest gated community.

And for better or worse, some forms of escape are easier than ever--just a click away and calling to you right now from the screen on which you're watching this sermon.

Perhaps you've used that screen to escape from your current reality. From your boredom? From your frustration? From your suffering? From your powerlessness?

I have. I do it almost every day. My devices are portals to the people I love who I can't hug during COVID. They are my connection to my now-closed office, and my kids' connection to their schools. They are my primary source of entertainment, delivering books and magazines and television shows and movies and games. They provide information and news. They enable me to engage in commerce and pay my bills and talk with my doctor--all without the risks of exposure to COVID.

They also, sometimes, stimulate my brain in which my real life doesn't. Those hits of dopamine I feel when I hear a message notification are by design. Yet my constant toggling between my present and the imagined potential of the next incoming message contributes to an ever-growing sense of loneliness, of emptiness, of powerlessness. For all my points of connection, there are lots of times when my devices leave me feeling disconnected and dissociated. It can feel like my life online is a wholly different existence from my life in the physical world--sometimes in a good way, but sometimes in a not-so-good way. Sometimes I want and need the escape, but sometimes I get distracted from the things that need my attention. My work. My family. My faith. My community. God's creation.

Today's scripture reading is a story about attention. The disciples think Jesus is dead and gone, body broken by the powers of this broken world. When he shows

up and greets them, they are understandably alarmed, thinking they are seeing some sort of Ghost. Jesus implores them to pay attention, to look carefully at his real hands, his real feet. To touch his real body. His real wounds. And then he asks them for help. He's hungry. Might they have a bite to eat? And so the real body of the real Jesus eats some real fish. Tasting and chewing and swallowing. These details matter--they are meant to draw your ear to the physicality of this interaction with the once-dead-now-alive Christ.

In doing so, the story calls us to deep presence in the here and the now. It calls us to the reality that God is among us in this physical, material world. That the material world matters to God. That as much as we want to look for God in the heavens, far, far away, God wants us to keep our attention here. Episcopal priest and author Robert Farrar Capon puts it like this:

There is a habit that plagues many so-called spiritual minds: they imagine that matter and spirit are somehow at odds with each other and that the right course for human life is to escape from the world of matter into some finer and purer (and undoubtedly duller) realm... In fact, it was God who invented dirt, onions, and turnip greens... God who, at the end of each day of creation, pronounced a resounding "Good!" at the end of his concoctions. And it is God's unrelenting love of all the stuff of this world that keeps it in being at every moment. So, if we are fascinated, even intoxicated, by matter, it is no surprise: we are made in the image of the Ultimate Materialist.

- Robert Farrar, Capon, The Supper of the Lamb (New York: Random House, 2002), xxvi.

The image of the Ultimate Materialist. God loves the material world, so much so that God gave God's only child to join the world in its deepest suffering and show that another way is possible. That despite our yearning to get out, God calls us to steward the earth, to focus on the wounded ones in our midst, to offer what we have to help.

This is not really news--the idea that God calls us to attend to the needs of the world. But what is new is the extent to which our attention has been commanded and commodified for the purpose of generating profit. For millennia, people have extracted the resources of the earth and the labor of our bodies to consolidate wealth. Now, corporations have realized the real money is in our minds. And the more clicks and views and streams that draw our attention, the less capacity we have to meaningfully engage with the matter of this world.

God's first job description for humans is to care for the matter of this world, the same earthly matter from which God formed us. The more we disengage from the physical realities of this world, the more we disengage from core activities of discipleship--feeding the hungry, quenching the thirsty, healing the sick and

freeing the oppressed. We can't feed the sick if we can't grow food due to arid, depleted soil. We can't quench thirst with polluted water. Disease is spreading in new, faster ways as ecosystems break down. And the loss of environmental resources of all kinds is depleting resilience and increasing vulnerability, particularly in low income populations and communities of color.

Even as more and more of us seek escape from the present reality, the climate crisis is accelerating. We see this daily in Global Ministries' work in humanitarian response, as we walk alongside the church in an uphill struggle against the mass suffering created by climate exacerbated disasters, crop failure, disease, and forced migration. When we engage in missions and ministries and lifestyles that pay little attention to their environmental impact, we perpetuate that suffering.

That deliverance of people who are exploited and oppressed necessarily requires a deep engagement with the relationships between God, people, and creation. The sanctity and integrity of God's creation are central.

If we are to reclaim the centrality of the sanctity and integrity of creation--if we are to act on the idea that this material world really does matter, both to us and to God--then we need to begin by reclaiming our attention from the things that seek to colonize our minds with little regard for our souls.

Writer and artist Jenny Odell is the author of a great book called *How to Do Nothing*. Odell recommends civil disobedience in the attention economy--a reclaiming of the value of our attention and a refusal to simply give it away. She speaks to the ways in which our attention is bought and sold as we passively consume, drawing us away from the realities of the world. She invites us to train our minds to withdraw from those attention sucks and to direct our attention toward the world we want.

Just think of the potential in a mass shifting of attention from the virtual world to the physical world--a great act of resistance of the things that would pull us from this present. A collective commitment to deep engagement with the matter of matter. A life in which we are mindful of the ways in which we use the resources of our minds.

Odell notes that different people have different levels of agency over their own attention, and that agency over one's attention is commensurate with one's power in the world. She says, "There is a significant portion of people for whom the project of day-to-day survival leaves little room for anything else...This is why it's even more important for anyone who does have a margin--even the tiniest one--to put it to use in opening up margins further down the line. Tiny spaces can open up small spaces. Small spaces can open up bigger spaces. If you can

afford to pay a different kind of attention, you should.”

- *Jenny Odell, How to Do Nothing: Resisting the Attention Economy* (New York: Random House, 2020), loc 1797.

This is what Jesus calls us to as well. To pay a different kind of attention to Christ's presence in our midst. To see and feel the suffering. To respond to requests for sustenance. To resist the colonization of our minds at the expense of a world that needs our stewardship now. And in doing so, to open up margins for others to do the same. To seek the kin-dom of God on earth as it is in heaven. May it be so.

Rev. Jenny Phillips is senior technical advisor for Environmental Sustainability at Global Ministries. She is an elder in extension ministry from the Pacific Northwest Conference and has a Master of Divinity from Union Theological Seminary in New York.

Hymn: *How Great Thou Art*

[[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, we thank you for this earth, our home;
For the wide sky and the blessed sun,
For the salt sea and the running water,
For the everlasting hills
And the never-resting winds,
For trees and the common grass underfoot.
We thank you for our senses
By which we hear the songs of birds,
And see the splendor of the summer fields,
And taste of the autumn fruits,
And rejoice in the feel of the snow,
And smell the breath of the spring.
Grant us a heart wide open to all this beauty;
And save our souls from being so blind
That we pass unseeing
When even the common thorn bush
Is aflame with your glory,
O God our creator,
Who lives and reigns forever and ever.
Amen.

A Prayer to Send us Back Out into the World

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

Thanks, John Panto, Jill Aitken, Candy Tiner, and Sanjay Cherian, for being our Lay Leaders this week! And thank you to Yifan Kang for choosing the music.

Lord, grant us the wisdom to care for the earth and till it.

Help us to act now for the good of future generations and all your creatures.

Help us to become instruments of a new creation,

Founded on the covenant of your love.

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: *Creation Hymn* by Matt Boswell

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

Here ends our worship, now let our service begin.



PRAYER LIST (04/18/21)

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 the Family and Friends of Heidi Gonterman, Candy's cousin, who died at 44 of an overdose,
- For the Family and Friends of George R. Boggis, Peter's friend and member of the community, who passed away after a short struggle with cancer
- We pray for Daunte Wright and his family.
- We pray for our country and our people, may we learn to listen and understand each other.
- We pray for Rev. Cath as she recuperates at home and prepares for her knee surgery, which is being rescheduled.
- For those who have no one to pray for them, accept our prayers;
- Individuals serving in our military & their families

Household Prayer: Morning²

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 Reflection³

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 ...

² 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.

³ 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.

BCC YTD Financial Summary	Actual Income	Actual Expenses	Income vs Expenses + / -
March	\$24,471	\$22,683	\$1,788

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 2nd. 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/>

Brookline Rotary Club

As [this link](#) describes, for \$50 a year, the Brookline Rotary will set up an American flag on your property for five days on 5 major patriotic holidays. They then take it down and store it until the next holiday. It is a service that helps you fly the colors while supporting the Rotary Club's good works in the community.

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.