



The United Parish in Brookline

American Baptist • United Church of Christ • United Methodist



March 22, 2020

Fourth Sunday in Lent

Discernment: Finding Clarity in the Chaos

Having a Clearness Committee

Nursery care is available for all children up to age 5. Our professional caregivers provide activities, crafts, snacks, and a scripture-based curriculum. The nursery is on the second floor, Room 203.

Rocking chairs are available at the back of the Sanctuary.

Prayer books are available at the back of the Sanctuary or in the Marion Street Lobby.

Please share any prayers you have to be read aloud during the Prayers of the People.

Hearing devices are available from the ushers.

*Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves,
like locked rooms and like books that are now written in a very foreign tongue.
Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them.
And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now.
Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer.*

Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet* #4

GATHERING MUSIC

*We transition into our sacred time
together as music invokes the spirit of God.*

***CHIMING THE TRINITY** * means we invite you to rise in body and spirit
We call forth God the Creator, Savior and Holy Spirit in musical tones.

***OPENING HYMN** *Come and Find the Quiet Center*
We lift our voices, bodies, minds words by Shirley Erena Murray
and spirits as a community in a song of praise.
We invite you to sing, speak or silently read the words together.

BEACH SPRING

*Come and find the quiet center in the crowded life we lead,
Find the room for hope to enter, find the frame where we are freed:
Clear the chaos and the clutter, clear our eyes that we can see
All the things that really matter, be at peace, and simply be.*

*Silence is a friend who claims us, cools the heat and slows the pace,
God it is who speaks and names us, knows our being, touches base,
Making space within our thinking, lifting shades to show the sun,
Raising courage when we're shrinking, finding scope for faith begun.*

*In the Spirit let us travel, open to each other's pain,
Let our loves and fears unravel, celebrate the space we gain:
There's a place for deepest dreaming, there's a time for heart to care,
In the Spirit's lively scheming there is always room to spare.*

GREETINGS

We warmly welcome all into our midst.

Kent French and Amy Norton
Senior Pastor and Associate Pastor

One: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

All: **And also with you.**

CENTERING PRAYER in unison

We center ourselves in the awareness of God's presence.

God of Love,
to you all hearts are open,
all desires known,
and from you no secrets are hid:

Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love you,
and worthily magnify your holy name;
through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PSALM

Psalm 66:1-20

Cantor and Congregation

We set our intention for worship by hearing the words of the Psalmist, and responding together in song.

Psalm will appear on screen.

The cantor will sing the Response (*R*) the first time alone;
please join singing at home the second time.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION *in unison, based on the Prayer of Saint Francis*

Together, we confess the ways we have gotten out of step with God and seek to re-center ourselves in the Love of God.

Lord, make us instruments of your peace.

Where we have sown the seeds of hatred, let us sow love;
where there is injury, let us sow pardon;
where there is discord, union;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy.

**Grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;
to be understood as to understand;
to be loved as to love.**

**For it is in giving that we receive;
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
and it is in dying that we
are born to eternal life...**

SILENT CONFESSION

We continue praying in silence for up to one minute for our personal confessions and spiritual centering.

One: O God, in your compassion;

All: Hear our prayer.

***ASSURANCE OF PARDON** *please rise*

We receive the Good News that we are loved, forgiven and renewed in God's presence.

***THE PEACE** *We share this Good News among ourselves with words of Peace and Love,
while we bump elbows, bow to one another, or make the Peace sign.*

One: The Peace of Christ and the Love of God be with you always;

All: And also with you.

***PEACE RESPONSE**

We re-gather with our voices in song.

Return Again
by Shlomo Carlebach

All Sing

*Return again, return again,
Return to the land of your soul. (repeat)*

*Return to who you are,
Return to what you are,
Return to where you are born and reborn again*

*Return again, return again,
Return to the land of your soul.*

Lai lai lai lai...

***READING FROM THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES Acts 17:22-30**

We reflect together on the stories and writings from the early days of the Church.

Jaz Buchanan
Seminararian

One: The Good News of the Holy Spirit;

All: **Thanks be to God!**

MESSAGE

We reflect together on how the Word of God plays out in our lives.

Finding Clarity in the Chaos

Kent French
Senior Pastor

HYMN

*We reflect on the message
in poetry and song.*

We Yearn, O Christ, for Wholeness

New Century Hymnal #179
PASSION CHORALE

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

*We pray together for our congregation, our surrounding community,
the nation and the world.*

Amy Norton
Associate Pastor and Seminararian

One: O God, hear our prayer,

All: **And guide us in your love.**

LORD'S PRAYER *We say together the prayer Jesus taught us.*

Taizé Chant

We invite you to use your chosen words for Creator, singing instead: Our Father, Our Mother, Sustainer, Redeemer or...



Cre - a - tor in hea - ven, ho - ly be your name. Your king-dom come,
Your will be done, on earth as in heav - en. Give us to-day our dai - ly
bread. For give us our sins as we for-give those who sin a-against us.
Keep us from temp- ta - tion, and de - li - ver us from e - vil. For the
King-dom, the pow-er and the glo - ry are yours, now and for-e - ver. A - men.

OFFERING *We offer our gifts for God's service and our visitor cards. No gift is too small or too large. All are precious.*

Invitation

We hear from community members about why they take part.

Offertory Anthem

Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing

Micah DeSelms, cello

We offer our gifts as our musicians offer a song of praise and thanksgiving. from John Wyeth's *Repository of Sacred Music*, 1813

*Doxology

Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow

LASST UNS ERFREUEN

We sing a song of praise and thanksgiving as we bring forth our gifts.

*Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
Praise God, all creatures here below: Alleluia! Alleluia!
Praise God the source of all our gifts!
Praise Jesus Christ, whose power uplifts!
Praise the Spirit, Holy Spirit! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!*

***Prayer of Dedication** *We ask God's blessing over the gifts.*

Jaz Buchanan

*CLOSING HYMN

Blessed Be the Tie That Binds

New Century Hymnal #393

Together in song, we set our intention in leaving this sacred space.

JEFFERSON

*BENEDICTION

We receive a blessing as we prepare to depart this sacred gathering.

***BENEDICTION RESPONSE**

Dona Nobis Pacem

DeSelms Family Quartet
Congregation

*The choir continues the prayer with singing.
All are invited to join them.*

HOLY BUSINESS

We share news of God's work in our community's activities.

During this season of Lent, we invite everyone to observe the Postlude as a prayerful moment.

POSTLUDE

Susan DeSelms

*We transition out of our sacred
time together with music.*

WELCOME

We at the United Parish in Brookline believe that all people are made in the image of God and embrace and cherish every person and every kind of family. Jesus Christ welcomed everyone; we seek to follow his example in our own life and worship, by extending God's love and grace abundantly and equally to everyone. We affirm and welcome all people to share in worship, fellowship and leadership with us, to join us in a diversity of race, gender, sexual identity, physical and mental ability, ethnicity and economic means.

We have joined with other Open and Affirming (United Church of Christ) and Welcoming and Affirming (American Baptist Churches USA), as well as with the Reconciling Ministries Network (United Methodist Churches) to declare that we are and will remain open to all people.

We invite you to consider becoming a member of the United Parish family. You may become a member by transferring membership or by a statement of faith. If you desire to retain ties with a former church, we invite you to become an associate or affiliate member for the time you are with us.

*We ask that you silence all electronic devices.
Please see an usher if you would like a hearing assistive device.*

*Because our building is open to the public,
an adult should accompany children if/when they leave the worship service.*

Ministers
Senior Pastor
Associate Pastor
Seminarian
Minister of Music
Assistant Music Director
Communications and Office Administrator
Sexton
Building Usage Coordinator
Accounting Administrator
Nursery Supervisor
Pastor Emerita

The People of the United Parish
Kent French
Amy Norton
Jasmine Buchanan
Susan DeSelms
Josaphat Contreras
Sarah Fitzpatrick
Daniel Schenk
Helen Hassinger
Donald Firth
Jenna Bergquist
Patricia Coughlin



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Discernment: Finding Clarity in the Chaos

Week 4: Discerning through a Clearness Committee

Take-home questions

These are some questions and ideas for you to reflect further on today's worship and to join us in our collective Lenten study of Discernment.

In today's story from the Acts of the Apostles (17:22-30), Paul says that we are meant to:

God and perhaps grope for God and find God—though indeed God is not far from each one of us. For “In God we live and move and have our being” (vv. 27-28)

Are there times when you feel like you're groping (searching blindly and with uncertainty) to find God? When and what are those times like?

Is there a particular question, challenge, issue that you're wrestling with right now and trying to find where God is in it?

Are there 2-3 friends whom you could imagine helping you with this decision, who could ask open, honest questions of you? Who?

Today we talked about the Quaker concept of a “Clearness Committee,” a small group designed to help you find the inner wisdom of God as it exists in you.

The following resources have more information about how to form a Clearness Committee:

The Center for Courage and Renewal: <http://www.couragerenewal.org/clearnesscommittee/>

The Friends General Conference (Quakers)

<https://www.fgcquaker.org/resources/clearness-committees-what-they-are-and-what-they-do>

The distinguishing mark of a Clearness Committee is that they ask open, honest questions of you, in order to help you find the deeper wisdom of God residing in your soul.

They do not give advice, they do not seek to psychoanalyze, they do not share their own perspective, they merely ask you questions and help you come up with the answers.

If this is something that interests you, we invite you to check out

Some suggested practices for the week ahead

These are some easy-to-try spiritual practices that can help you as you launch into a season of discernment. Feel free to pick and choose, experiment and see how they feel and then report back to us next week. You are welcome to join us in study groups after Sunday worship in Lent or other times. Check out the homepage link at the bottom of the page.

Lectio Divina

Lectio Divina (literally divine reading) is a way of becoming immersed in the Scriptures very personally. It draws on the way Jews read the Haggadah, a text read during Passover that retells the Exodus story. Haggadah means “telling” and along with being a physical text, the word captures the practice of telling and retelling a story to find deeper meaning.

The Christian form of Lectio Divina was first introduced by St. Gregory of Nyssa (c 330- 395), and also encouraged by St. Benedict of Nursia (c 480-547), the founder of the Benedictine order. It’s a way of developing a closer relationship with God by reflecting prayerfully on God’s word in scripture. In Lectio Divina, the chosen spiritual text is read four times in total, giving an opportunity to think deeply about it and respond thoughtfully. When we practice Lectio Divina, we sometimes can imagine we’re actually involved in the events of Scripture.

Here’s how to get started:

Prepare

Light a candle and/or pray a prayer of invitation, saying something like, “God, let me/us hear from you,” and spend a few minutes sitting quietly so one’s mind is open to hearing from God.

Lectio (Read)

The first reading is an opportunity to get to know the Scripture passage. Listen carefully for any words or phrases that seem to jump out. Write down or share those words if you are doing this with someone. No need for lots of explanation, just share what caught your attention.

Meditatio (Reflect)

On the second reading of the same passage, listen for the deeper meaning God has infused in this scripture particularly for you in your life today. How does it make you feel? If there’s no immediate response, ask God to be more present with you.

Oratio (Respond)

After a third reading, what action could you take based on this message from God, that would keep up the conversation with God and deepen your connections to the Spirit.

Contemplatio (Rest)

After the final reading, spend around 5 minutes in silent contemplation. This doesn’t need to be a time of prayer or deep thought — just sit quietly and allow God to work. When the mind starts to wander and dart here and there, bring it gently back to stillness again.

Spiritual Examen

A spiritual practice derived from St. Ignatius of Loyola, a Spanish Basque Catholic priest and theologian, who gave up a life of nobility and co-founded the religious order called the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) in the 16th century. The examen was developed in the 1500s as a core practice and is used to this day by Jesuits and other religious groups.

Find a quiet, comfortable place to spend about 10 minutes at the end of each day this week:

1. Give thanks for all God's gifts and benefits
2. Ask for light/God's presence
3. Review the day: thoughts, words, deeds, desires, consolations, desolations
4. Express gratitude, sorrow or purpose of amendment
5. Ask for the graces you desire for tomorrow

You can make it as long or short as you want. Try repeating the practice throughout the week.

Practicing Gratitude

Another practice is to name and write down three *specific* things each day for which you are thankful.

It could be anything: time with a loved one, a delicious meal, an unexpected break in your day, a kind exchange with a stranger, something in nature.

The point is to make it specific, and spend some time in your mind reliving the experience, savoring the feelings and thoughts they brought up in you.

This is a core practice that neuroscientists suggest in helping change some of our brain patterns from our predetermined negative, anxious bias to a cultivated, more positive, hopeful outlook.

Prayer Partners

We welcome EVERYONE at United Parish to try having a prayer partner in Lent.

You may think that you are not that spiritual, or that you don't know how to pray, or even if you do, you don't want to share that with someone else, that it's private. That's OK. Just give it a try.

It's a holy experiment, basically committing to having a spiritual buddy in the congregation with whom you talk for 5-15 minutes each week from now through Easter (April 12).

You can sign up at unitedparishbrookline.org/prayer-partners-during-lent

An online "data-driven" daily discernment practice

Methodist colleagues at the Harvard-Epworth Church in Cambridge have created a daily discernment opportunity, in which they email you a question each day to answer as part of your own private discernment practice. You can check it out and sign up at 4oform.org/signup

Scripture for your week ahead

Ponder this verse from the Epistles (James 1:5) *If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.*

Take a few minutes to read and reread it during the week, paying attention to how it lands with you at different times and in different situations. Are you able to trust God to provide wisdom when you ask for it? How is God calling you to listen and be receptive to divine wisdom?

Throughout your week, you may also want to re-read the verses from Psalm 40, that we chanted in worship today.

For more information, check out unitedparishbrookline.org/news/opportunities-during-lent.