

*A Service of Worship for  
4 February 2024*

No task is ever completed,  
only abandoned or pressed into use.  
Tinkering can be a form of prayer.  
Twenty-six botched worlds preceded  
Genesis we are told in ancient commentary,  
and ha-Shem said not only,  
of this particular attempt,  
It is good, but muttered,  
if only it will hold.  
Incomplete, becoming, the world  
was given us to fix, to complete  
and we've almost worn it out.  
My house was hastily built,  
on the cheap. Leaks, rotting  
sills, the floor a relief map of Idaho.  
Whenever I get some money, I stove  
up, repair, add on, replace.  
The improvisation permits me to squat  
here on the land that owns me.  
We evolve through mistakes, wrong  
genes, imitation gone wild.  
Each night sleep unravels me into wool,  
then into sheep and wolf. Walls and fire  
pass through me. I birth stones.  
Every dawn I stumble from the roaring  
vat of dreams and wake myself up  
remembering and forgetting by halves.  
Every dawn I choose to take a knife  
to the world's flank or a sewing kit,  
rough improvisation, but a start.

Marge Piercy

Preparing for worship with silence

Gathering in peace

Peace be with you!  
**And also with you!**

Ring in the hour

Silence is kept

\*Prelude

George Shearing  
(1919-2011)

“Lord, When I Came Into This Life”

Call to Worship

+Opening Hymn #429

Abbot's Leigh

“Lord, You Give the Great Commission”

**Lord, you give the great commission:**

**“Heal the sick and preach the word.”**

**Lest the church neglect its mission,**

**And the gospel go unheard,**

**Help us witness to your purpose**

**With renewed integrity;**

**With the Spirit's gifts empower us**

**For the work of ministry.**

**Lord, you call us to your service:**

**“In my name baptize and teach.”**

**That the world may trust your promise,**

**Life abundant meant for each,**

**Give us all new fervor,**

**Draw us closer in community;**

**With the Spirit's gifts empower us**

**For the work of ministry.**

*\*Please hold silence and remain seated during the prelude*

*+Please stand in body or spirit*

**Lord, you make the common holy:**

**“This my body, this my blood.”**

**Let us all, for earth’s true glory,**

**Daily lift life heavenward,**

**Asking that the world around us**

**Share your children’s liberty;**

**With the Spirit’s gifts empower us**

**For the work of ministry.**

**Lord, you show us love’s true measure:**

**“Father, what they do, forgive.”**

**Yet we hoard as private treasure**

**All that you so freely give.**

**May your care and mercy lead us**

**To a just society;**

**With the Spirit’s gifts empower us**

**For the work of ministry.**

**Lord, you bless with words assuring:**

**“I am with you to the end.”**

**Faith and hope and love restoring,**

**May we serve as you intend,**

**And amid the cares that claim us,**

**Hold in mind eternity;**

**With the Spirit’s gifts empower us**

**For the work of ministry.**

**+Opening Sentences**

**We shall have to develop a more  
dynamic understanding of God  
as one who accompanies creation  
in its evolving story like  
a pianist in a silent movie.**

**We can choose the metaphor  
of the jazz session that  
constantly makes new music  
by listening to what’s happening**

*+Please stand in body or spirit*

**around it and applying the best  
of the tradition to the current context.  
The genius of improvisation seems to be  
a metaphor for actual human experience.  
God invites us to join the music,  
to listen to one another,  
to keep the music flowing.**

Invitation

Scripture Lesson

1 Corinthians 9:16-23

These are our sacred stories.

**Thanks be to God.**

Time for Children

First Sunday Food Offering

<sup>+</sup>Response:

Tallis' Canon

***Go with us, Lord, and guide the way  
Through this and every coming day,  
That in Your Spirit strong and true  
Our lives may be our gift to You.***

Call to Confession

Silent Confession

Unison Confession

**Our task now is to mend our broken world;  
if religion cannot do that, it is worthless.  
And what our world needs now  
is not belief, not certainty,  
but compassionate action  
and practically expressed respect  
for the sacred value of all human beings,  
even our enemies.**

Words of Assurance

## “Seek to Serve”

*May I live in the world as one who always seeks to serve.  
May I live as one who knows the love of God.  
Lord, teach me how to live and how to serve.  
With my ears may I hear. With my eyes may I see.  
With my lips may I speak. May your Word be heard through me.  
Thus as I live each day may love sustain the will to serve. Amen.*

## Meditation

Ordaining **Bridget O’Toole**.

Commissioning the 2024 Diaconate

Leader: Today we call this group to be our spiritual leaders in the coming year. Let us say why we have called them.

**Community: Our call to each of you – Josh Apple, Annie Christensen, Amy Corron, Genie Joslin, Karen Kline, Nita Lindley, Moses Mason, Barbara McKittrick, Joe Milano, Bridget O’Toole, Nancy Preston, Lisa Spiro, K.T. Tilford, and Susan Wegner – is an affirmation of your gifts and an expression of our gratitude and respect for you. We do not call you to be different people. We call you because of who you are - generous with your gifts, aware of our needs.**

Leader: What do we ask of these spiritual leaders?

**Community: We ask you to guide us on our journey together: to be a step or two ahead; to inspire us to recognize and share our own gifts; to encourage and comfort us when things go wrong and celebrate with us when things are right. While we expect you to do certain tasks, we also ask that you give free reign to your imagination, insight, compassion and your capacity to love. In this spirit, together our community can deepen and grow.**

Leader: Do you – Josh, Annie, Amy, Genie, Karen, Nita, Moses, Barbara, Joe, Bridget, Nancy, Lisa, K.T., and Susan – accept the call you have heard here today?

Deacons: We do. We stand before you committed to exercise our gifts with courage and compassion.

Leader: What do you ask of us?

Deacons: We ask you to be courageous and compassionate; to challenge and stretch us. We ask you to join with us on this sacred journey of exploration and discovery.

**All: Let us go forth together in love, sharing joys and sorrows, triumphs and tragedy, seeking God's peace and justice both within and without.**

<sup>+</sup>Hymn

"I Am a Part of the Pulse of Creation"

## I Am a Part of the Pulse of Creation

Colin Gibson

Colin Gibson

1. I am a part of the pulse of cre - a - tion, e -  
2. Mine is the world of the stars and the ga - lax-ies,  
3. I take my share in the act of cre - a - tion.\_\_\_\_  
4. Born in the Spi - rit and wak-ing to free dom,\_\_\_\_

ter - ni - ty caught in a mo - ment ot time,  
li - mit - less e - ner - gy, move-ment and mass,  
find - ing new won - ders, new worlds to ex - plore;  
seek - ing to grow to the mea - sure of Christ,

part of the mys - t'ry, part of the beau - ty  
mine the un - fold - ing, mine the far - reach - ing,  
faith's e - vo - lu - tion, hope's re - so - lu - tion,  
part of the mys - try, part of the beau - ty,

part of the won - der - ful gift - ing of Life.  
gift of the in - fi - nite good - ness of Life  
lov - ing in tune with the mu - sic of Life.  
part of the won - drous cre - a - tion of Life.

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*+Please stand in body or spirit*

## Pastoral Prayer

### Offering Offertory

Thomas H. Kerr  
(1915-1988)

#### “Reverie”

*We will be tithing the cash offerings each first Sunday of the month. This means that we will give 100% of the cash offerings to one of the mission's organizations that Covenant partners with on the first Sunday of each month. These funds will be above and beyond what Covenant has budgeted to give to Missions.*

### +Prayer of Dedication

Leader: The world will say to you, “I am violent.” Respond by saying, “I am not. Not with my words and not with my actions.” The world will say to you, “We need to heal the planet.” Start by saying, “I don't need a plastic bag.” Recycle, reuse. Start by picking up one piece of trash on your block. The world will say to you, “There are too many problems.” Do not be afraid to be a part of the solutions. Start by discussing the issues. We cannot overcome what we ignore. The more we talk about things, the more we see that the issues are connected because we are connected. The world will say to you, “We need to end racism.” Start by healing it in your own family. The world will say to you, “How do we speak to bias and bigotry?” Start by having the first conversation at your own kitchen table.

**People: The world will say to you, “There is so much hate.” Devote yourself to love. Love yourself so much that you can love others without barriers and without judgment. When the world asks us big questions that require big answers, we have two options. One: to feel so overwhelmed or unqualified, we do nothing. Two: to start with one small act and qualify ourselves.**

### Doxology

Old Hundredth

*Praise God the Source of life and birth.  
Praise God the Word, who came to earth.  
Praise God the Spirit, holy flame,  
All glory, honor to God's name! Amen.*

<sup>+</sup>Affirmation of Faith

**Pure faith, exempt from doubt, does not exist.  
It is impossible to grow in faith  
without at the same time growing in unbelief.  
One cannot progress in faith  
without calling into question  
everything that one has previously believed.**

<sup>+</sup>Closing Hymn #354

Guide My Feet

“Guide My Feet”

**Guide my feet while I run this race,  
Guide my feet while I run this race,  
Guide my feet while I run this race,  
For I don't want to run this race in vain!**

**Hold my hand while I run this race,  
Hold my hand while I run this race,  
Hold my hand while I run this race,  
For I don't want to run this race in vain!**

**Stand by me while I run this race,  
Stand by me while I run this race,  
Stand by me while I run this race,  
For I don't want to run this race in vain!**

**I'm your child while I run this race,  
I'm your child while I run this race,  
I'm your child while I run this race,  
For I don't want to run this race in vain!**

**Search my heart while I run this race,  
Search my heart while I run this race,  
Search my heart while I run this race,  
For I don't want to run this race in vain!**

*<sup>+</sup>Please stand in body or spirit*



Benediction

\*Postlude

Jeanne Demessieux  
(1921-1968)

“Antiphon: Tu Es Petrus”

*\*Please hold silence and remain seated during the prelude*

## **Worship Notes**

The worship leaders are **Julian Laureles and Louis McKinny**.

The Call to Worship is from *The Great Partnership: Science, Religion, and the Search for Meaning* by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks.

The Opening Sentences are adapted from Richard Holloway's chapter, "Ethical Jazz," in *Godless Morality: Keeping Religion Out of Ethics*.

The Unison Confession is from *The Spiral Staircase: My Climb Out of Darkness* by Karen Armstrong.

The Prayer of Dedication is from Cleo Wade's TED talk, "Want to change the world? Start by being brave enough to care."

The Affirmation of Faith is from *If God Does Not Die* by Bernard Martin.

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## **Education 9:30 - 10:20 a.m.**

Adult Education - In order to mark Evolution Weekend, during which Covenant Church emphasizes the compatibility of religion and science, on Feb. 4 & 11, Bruce Yaeger will present a pair of classes titled "The Jail and Torches that Never Were: Debunking the Scopes-trial Myth." (Each class stands on its own in case you can't attend both.) Many people have heard of the 1925 Scopes "Monkey" trial over the teaching of evolution, but most people know only falsehoods about the trial (such as perpetuated by the movie *Inherit the Wind*). In these classes, Bruce will explain what really occurred before, during, and after that trial. Bruce Yaeger, a teacher for over 35 years, is the author of two books, including *Spirited Bodies Beneath the Stars: Science & Spirituality Together*.

- Bruce Yaeger

### **Children & Youth Education -**

Children's Lesson

Title: Nothing Fancy

Lesson: What is Success?

Youth Lesson

Making the Most of College Discussion hosted by Erica Middleton and Ann Christensen. The discussion will be aimed at future students (but parents are welcome to attend if you desire).

- Trena' Jamison

## Children and Youth Announcements

### Events

- **February 4:** Mentor and Youth
- **February 4:** Children's Activity
- **February 11: CHILDREN & YOUTH AUCTION**, please see newsletter for donation and food list.
- **April 21:** Children & Youth Sunday
- **June 9-13, 2024:** McMurry University Youth Camp Passport, please see newsletter to sign-up.
- **July 27-30, 2024:** Heart of Texas Camp Brownwood, TX Children Camp Passport, please see newsletter to sign-up.

### Calendar

Sun. Feb 4	9:30am	Adult Education, Adult Education classroom on the 2nd floor of the Huff Fellowship Hall Building
	9:30am	Children & Youth Education, Room B, 2nd floor of the Huff Fellowship Hall Building
	9:30am	Inquirer's Class, Sanctuary/Library
	10:20am	Hospitality, Huff Fellowship Hall Building
	10:40am	Covenant Singers Rehearsal, Sanctuary
	11:00am	Worship in-person, Sanctuary and via live-stream, YouTube
Tue. Feb 6	1:00 pm	Lunchtime Lectionary Lab, Zoom
Thurs. Feb 8	10:00 am	Community Group, Zoom

### Helpful Information

**Childcare:** Childcare is provided in the children's area beginning at 9:30 a.m. Children aged 2 and under are invited to the nursery. Children aged 3 to 9 are invited to the children's area after the Time for Children.

**Visitor's Card:** If you're a visitor with us, please submit a Visitor's Card.

**Celebrations and Concerns:** If you would like to share a celebration or concern with the Covenant community, please submit a Celebrations and Concerns Form.

**Membership:** If you are interested in learning more about Covenant, we encourage you to talk with one of the ministers or the worship leader. Email [Office@covenanthouston.org](mailto:Office@covenanthouston.org).

**Newsletter:** To subscribe to the newsletter, send a request to [office@covenanthouston.org](mailto:office@covenanthouston.org).

**Office Hours:** The church office is open Monday through Friday from 10am to 2pm.

**Covenant Recycles:** If you do not wish to keep your order of worship, please recycle it by placing it on the stand located in the narthex.

*Covenant Church affirms the sanctity, dignity, and equality  
of human beings and the value of all life in the universe.*

*We welcome persons of all racial and ethnic heritages, all sexual orientations,  
all gender identities, and all faith perspectives to our Christian community.*

*We stand for each individual's right to worship God and to respond  
to God's call to ministry in her or his own understanding  
of God's all-encompassing love.*

*We value a holistic approach to faith and seek to worship in ways that are  
intellectually credible, emotionally stimulating, spiritually engaging  
and contemporarily relevant.*

*We value music and art and ritual to express what we cannot ever fully say.*

*We value participation so that we might hear many approaches  
to our shared faith.*

**Covenant Church, an ecumenical, liberal, Baptist congregation**

Members of Covenant, Ministers  
Fran Avera, Minister of Music, Emerita  
Brian Buck, Facilities Coordinator  
Monique Cruz, Office and Financial Administrator  
Trena' Jamison, Director of Children and Youth  
David Lee, Director of Music  
Laura Mayo, Senior Minister  
Jason Steiner, Organist

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*Covenant Church recognizes the laws of the State of Texas and the rights of its citizens. Consistent with this acknowledgment and with respect for the values of our Church, we also acknowledge that our congregants and visitors seek a safe and comfortable space for worship and celebration. **In that spirit, we request that all firearms be left in a secure place outside of the Church.** We thank God for providing us with the opportunity to worship together and to continue to respect each other as human beings.*