

*A Service of Worship for  
28 January 2024*

Before the service would begin,  
once upon a time,  
the choir would wait in silence  
with time to read the program cover,  
time to stare upward  
at heavenly morning light  
cast high on the white wall,  
a still horizontal rectangle  
moving with the sun.

A stir outside a high window,  
pecan leaves and branches  
moving in shafts of air,  
a natural appearance of God.

To begin the service,  
the organist would move in socked feet  
to strike a bowl with a wooden mallet,  
sound of a gong,  
sound of a gong  
to reverberate into the chapel recesses  
before Bach  
or Buxtehude sounded.

Then would follow a layperson  
as worship leader behind the pulpit  
to continue a well-calibrated order  
of service designed to temper cynicism,  
to mark the sanctuary as a place  
where we reflect on empathy and mystery.

This sanctuary now captures only musical  
segments for a virtual service.  
We savor still shots,  
the latest the storied organ,  
its small mirror reflecting the dais  
and the high white wall.

Met on my computer  
not by reliquary housing,  
but by rectangular embedded videos,  
I click on each, one by one, to witness an  
element of ritual, segmented, sequestered,

parceled out in increments of seven,  
twelve, sixteen minutes.

The distorted sounds  
of the Zoomed piano prelude  
and of the pre-pandemic choir  
remind me of the former full-throttled organ  
and the clarity of disciplined assembled  
voices.

The spoken segments have better sound,  
the usual quality of preparation,  
insight for confession,  
our shared foibles, blindness, neglect.

Our minister's screened proclamation  
cannot duplicate her delivery  
in our presence on the dais,  
but her low voiced modulations  
give emotional presence to our sacred stories  
rescued from their literal meanings,  
recast in mythical terms.

After the benediction and postlude,  
we cannot say goodbye to one another  
as we file out, cannot somehow  
intimate to the presenters  
how moving they were.

Nor can we exit as usual either  
onto the labyrinth and grassy street side  
or onto the raised vegetable beds  
and color garden  
where bees land and take off,  
making flowers bob up and down,  
the kind of spaces absent to us  
in our rooms  
as we bend over our devices.

- Lewis Garvin



Preparing for worship with silence

Gathering in peace

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

Ring in the hour

Silence is kept

\*Prelude

Helmut Walcha  
(1907-1991)

“Pastorale”

Call to Worship

+Opening Hymn #275

Sandon

“God of Our Life”

**God of our life, through all the circling years, We trust in Thee;  
In all the past, through all our hopes and fears, Thy hand we see.  
With each new day, when morning lifts the veil,  
We own Thy mercies, Lord, which never fail.**

**God of the past, our times are in Thy hand; with us abide.  
Lead us by faith to hope's true promised land; be Thou our guide.  
With Thee to bless, the darkness shines as light,  
And faith's fair vision changes into sight.**

**God of the coming years, through paths unknown We follow Thee;  
When we are strong, Lord, leave us not alone; Our refuge be.  
Be Thou for us in life our daily bread,  
Our heart's true home when all our years have sped.**

*\*Please hold silence and remain seated during the prelude  
+Please stand in body or spirit*

<sup>+</sup>Opening Sentences

**God is the thread of hope  
that desperate people hold on to.  
God is that scrap of life and goodness  
still in us.  
God is whatever life and love there is,  
no matter how small.  
We hold on to whatever shred of hope is left.  
It is very small indeed sometimes –  
but it is enough.**

Invitation

Scripture Lesson

Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18

These are our sacred stories.

**Thanks be to God.**

Time for Children

<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

**God, we are tired of feeling helpless  
when we think of your world,  
its hurt and its brokenness.  
We are tired of starving children and weeping mothers,  
of parched soil and polluted streams.  
We are tired of polls and politicians,  
of angry poverty and comfortable wealth.**

**Forgive our exhaustion, O God.  
Renew our compassion.  
Give us the courage to keep going,  
with hearts and hands wide open in love. Amen.**

Words of Assurance

Music

K. Lee Scott

“Search Me, O God”

*Search me, O God, and know my heart;  
try me and know my inmost thought.  
See if there is any evil in me,  
and lead me in the way everlasting.  
Where shall I go from your Spirit?  
And where shall I go from your presence?  
If I ascend up to heaven, you are there;  
if I make the grave my bed, you are there.  
If I rise on wings of the morning,  
and dwell in lands across the sea,  
even there will your hand uphold me;  
and there will your right hand sustain me*

Silent Reflection

Proclamation

“You Are Before Me, Lord”

**You are before me, Lord, You are behind,  
And over me You have spread out Your hand;  
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,  
Too high to grasp, too great to understand.**

**Then from Your spirit where, Lord, shall I go;  
And from Your presence where, Lord, shall I fly?  
If I ascend to heaven You are there,  
And still are with me if in hell I lie.**

**If I should take my flight into the dawn,  
If I should dwell on ocean's farthest shore,  
Your mighty hand will rest upon me still,  
And your right hand will guard me evermore.**

**If I should say, “Let darkness cover me,  
And I shall hide within the veil of the night,”  
Surely the darkness is not dark to You:  
The night is as the day, the darkness light.**

**Search me, O God, search me and know my heart;  
Try me, O God, my mind and spirit try;  
Keep me from any path that gives You pain,  
And lead me in the everlasting way.**

Prayer

Offering  
Offertory

Elizabeth Stirling  
(1819-1895)

“Largo”

<sup>+</sup>Prayer of Dedication

**Source of all being,  
we turn to You as did our people in ancient days.  
They beheld You in the stars,  
they felt You in their hearts,  
they sought You in their lives.**

**Now their quest is ours.  
Help us, O God, to see the wonder of being.  
Give us courage to search for truth.  
Teach us the path to a better life.  
So shall we, by our lives and labors,  
bring nearer to realization the great hope inherited from ages past,  
for a world transformed by liberty, justice, and peace.**

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

**God is justice  
and kindness,  
mercy,  
and always—  
always—  
love.  
So if you want to know  
where God is  
in this  
or in anything,  
look for love.**

“Abide with Me”

**Abide with me: fast falls the eventide;  
The darkness deepens; Lord, with me abide!  
When other helpers fail and comforts flee,  
Help of the helpless, O abide with me.**

**Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day;  
Earth's joys grow dim, its glories pass away;  
Change and decay in all around I see.  
O Thou who changest not, abide with me.**

**I need Thy presence every passing hour;  
What but thy grace can foil the tempter's power?  
Who, like Thyself, my guide and stay can be?  
Through cloud and sunshine, Lord, abide with me.**

**I fear no foe, with Thee at hand to bless  
Ills have no weight, and tears no bitterness.  
Where is death's sting? Where, grave, Thy victory?  
I triumph still, if Thou abide with me.**

**Hold Thou Thy cross before my closing eyes;  
Shine through the gloom and point me to the skies:  
Heaven's morning breaks, and earth's vain shadows flee;  
In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me.**

Benediction

<sup>\*</sup>Postlude

Dietrich Buxtehude  
(1637-1707)

“Praeludium in F, BuxWV 145”

*<sup>\*</sup>Please hold silence and remain seated during the prelude  
<sup>+</sup>Please stand in body or spirit*



## **Worship Notes**

The worship leader is **Laura Mitchell**.

The Call to Worship is by Maya Angelou.

The Opening Sentences are from *A New Climate for Theology: God, the World, and Global Warming* by Sallie McFague.

The Unison Confession is from *Worship for All Seasons*.

The Prayer of Dedication is from *Gates of Prayer: The New Union Prayer Book, the 1975 Prayer Book of the Central Conference of [Reformed] Rabbis*.

The Affirmation of Faith is from *Here if You Need Me: A True Story* by Kate Braestrup.

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

Adult Education - Council recently approved a proposal by the social justice working group that Covenant adopt climate action as its focus for 2024. Lisa Spiro will explain why we should make climate action a church-wide focus and discuss how we can work towards our commitment to reduce our carbon impact through our participation in the Cool Congregations cohort.

- *Lisa Spiro*

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

Children's Lesson

Title: The Greedy Gambler

Lesson: Non-Greed

Youth Lesson

Scripture: Deuteronomy 18:15-20

- *Trena' Jamison*

## Children and Youth Announcements

- **February 4:** Mentor and Youth
- **February 4:** Children's Activity
- **February 25: CHILDREN & YOUTH AUCTION**
  - **Donation and Food list (please see newsletter for link)**
- **March 29:** Youth Lock-In
- **March 30:** Annual Easter Egg Hunt
- **April 21:** Children & Youth Sunday
- **June 9-13, 2024:** McMurry University Youth Camp Passport **(please see newsletter for sign-up link).**
- **July 27-30, 2024:** Heart of Texas Camp Brownwood, TX Children Camp Passport, **(please see newsletter for sign-up link).**

### Calendar

Sun. Jan 28	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
	12:00pm	Congregational Business Meeting, Sanctuary
	12:15pm	Handbell Rehearsal, Sanctuary/Children's Area
Tue. Jan 30	1:00 pm	Lunchtime Lectionary Lab, Zoom
Thurs. Feb 1	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.*