

# Church of the Covenant

*Presbyterian Church (USA) and United Church of Christ*



**April 28, 2024**  
**The Fifth Sunday of Easter**



**Church of the Covenant**  
**Fifth Sunday of Easter**  
April 28, 2024, 10:30 am [Zoom Link](#)

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Welcome and thank you for worshipping together for this “hybrid” service where some will be in the sanctuary at 67 Newbury Street, and some in the sanctuary of places far and near. For those joining online, we begin on Zoom at the above. Please keep your mic muted during the service.

*\*You are invited to rise in body or spirit.*

**Prelude**

*Air on the G String*

J. S. Bach

**Welcome & Announcements**

One: Peace be with you.

Many: **And also with you.**

One: Alleluia! Christ is risen!

Many: **Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!**

**\* Call to Worship**

(from Psalm 1)

One: Blessed are those who walk hand in hand with goodness,

Many: **For their delight is in the Spirit of Love, and in God’s heart they dwell day and night.**

One: They are like trees planted by streams of water, that yield fruit in due season,

Many: **Their leaves flourish, and in all they do, they give life.**

**\* Kindling the Christ Light**

One: The light of Christ

Many: **Thanks be to God!**

**\* Opening Hymn NCH (black) 17 (vs. 1, 3, 5, 6) To You, O God, All Creatures Sing**

To you, O God, all creatures sing,

And all creation, everything

Sings your praises, alleluia!

Your burning sun with golden beam,

Your silver moon with softer gleam

Sing your praises, alleluia,

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

Your flowing waters, crystal clear,  
Make melodies for you to hear,  
Sing your praises, alleluia!  
Your fire, bountiful and bright,  
Remembering your warmth and light,  
Sings your praises, alleluia,  
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

Now we who are of tender heart,  
Forgiving others, take our part,  
Sing your praises, alleluia!  
To you we lift our pain and care,  
Receive the burdens that we bear,  
Singing praises, alleluia,  
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

In you, a kind and gentle death  
Prepares to hush our final breath,  
Singing praises, alleluia!  
Christ goes before us to renew  
The way that leads us home to you,  
Hear our praises, alleluia,  
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

### **Prayer for Grounding in God's Grace**

*Adapted from "Morning Prayer for Fellow  
Prisoners" by Dietrich Bonhoeffer*

**One:** O God, we cry to you.

**Many:** **Help us to pray and to concentrate our thoughts on you;**

**One:** We can't do this alone.

In us and around us there is darkness,

**Many:** **But with you there is light;**

**One:** We are lonely, but you do not leave us;

**Many:** **We are feeble in heart, but with you there is help;**

**One:** We are restless, but with you there is peace.

**Many:** **In us and around us there is bitterness, but with you there is  
patience;**

**One:** We don't understand your ways,

**Many:** But you know the way for us.

**One:** It is your will that we should know you and turn to you.

**Many:** **God, we hear your call and follow. Help us.**

*One: Let us now open our hearts to God in silent prayer . . .*

## Listening to God in Silent Prayer

### Assurance of God's Grace

**One:** Friends, let us hear the good news: God is love. And we are all loved. We are all forgiven, we are all reconciled. Therefore, let us celebrate together:

**Many:** **In Jesus Christ we are set free and made whole.  
Alleluia, Amen! Alleluia, Amen!**

### \* Sung Response

*Easter Celtic Alleluia*

Al - le - lu - ia, a - le - lu - ia!

Al - le - lu - ia, a - le - lu - ia!

### Readings from Scripture

**Hebrew Bible Reading** – Ecclesiastes 12:1-7

Remember your creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come, and the years draw near when you will say, “I have no pleasure in them”; before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened and the clouds return with the rain; on the day when the guards of the house tremble, and the strong men are bent, and the women who grind cease working because they are few, and those who look through the windows see dimly; when the doors on the street are shut, and the sound of the grinding is low, and one rises up at the sound of a bird, and all the daughters of song are brought low; when one is afraid of heights, and terrors are in the road; the almond tree blossoms, the grasshopper drags itself along and desire fails; because all must go to their

eternal home, and the mourners will go about the streets; before the silver cord is snapped, and the golden bowl is broken, and the pitcher is broken at the fountain, and the wheel broken at the cistern, and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the breath returns to God who gave it.

**New Testament Reading** – 1 John 4:7, 16b, 18, 21

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God...

God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them... There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear...

The commandment we have from God is this: those who love God must love their siblings also.

**Gospel Reading** – John 11:17-19, 33-38

When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, and many of the community had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother...

When Jesus saw Mary weeping, and the community who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Rabbi, come and see." Jesus wept. So the community said, "See how he loved him!" But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, "Take away the stone."

**One:** God is still speaking, the word of God,

**Many:** **Thanks be to God.**

**Sung Response**

*Easter Celtic Alleluia*

**Sermon**

"The Presence of Absence"

**\* Hymn NCH 419 (black)**

*Now Thank We All Our God*

Now thank we all our God with heart and hands and voices,  
Who wondrous things has done, in whom this world rejoices;  
Who from our parents' arms has blessed us on our way  
With countless gifts of love, and still is ours today.

O may this bounteous God through all our life be near us,  
With ever joyful hearts and blessed peace to cheer us,  
And keep us still in grace, and guide us when perplexed,  
And free us from all ills in this world in the next.

All praise and thanks to God our Maker now be given,  
To Christ, and Spirit, too, our help in highest heaven,  
The one eternal God, whom earth and heaven adore,  
For thus it was, is now, and shall be evermore.

**Call to Offering**

Online Giving Option: <http://www.cotcbos.org/give.html>

*Click on Give Now, then choose Pledges or Gifts-General.*

**Offertory**

*Jesus, You're My Joy Forever*

J. S. Bach

**\* Doxology**

Tune: *Old Hundredth*

Praise God from whom all blessings flow,  
Praise God all creatures here below,  
Praise God for all that love has done,  
Creator, Christ, and Spirit, One.

**\* Prayer of Dedication**

**Commissioning of Pastor Rob for Extended Reflection Leave**

**Celebrations & Concerns**

One: God, in your grace,  
Many: **Receive our prayer.**

**Pastoral Prayer**



**\* Charge and Benediction**

**\* Exchange of the Peace**

*(Please exchange greetings of Christ's peace and reconciliation)*

**One:** May the peace of Christ be with you.

**Many:** **And also with you.**

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**Worship Participants**

**Preacher** – Rev. Rob Mark

**Worship Leader** – Rev. Joshua Lawrence Lazard

**Minister of Music** – Tom Handel

**Liturgist** – Marnie Warner

**Lector** – Tim Groves

**Covenant Choir**

**Ushers** – Linda Pursley, Denice Thornhill

**Audio Visual Tech Team** – Venkatesh Balasubramanian, Abhishek John, Jon Schwarz

**Sexton** – Jesús Vargas

**WELCOME TO CHURCH OF THE COVENANT!** We are so glad to have you worshipping with us today! If you are new to our community, we hope you will feel at home and welcomed during this service. If you have any questions about who we are as a community of faith, please reach out to an usher in person or our Digital Minister in the chat.

**DEACONS MEETING AFTER WORSHIP TODAY.** The Deacons are meeting after the service today, in the Williams Library.

**TREE GIVEAWAY (NEW DATE).** The Climate Jubilee Team will be handing out tree seedlings outside the church on Newbury Street after worship **today, April 28, from 12:00 noon to 2:00 pm.** Stop by and say hi!

**NEW TO COTC?** We are so glad you are here! Let us know a little bit about how we can welcome you by filling out the form at this QR code, and learn more on our website at [cotcbos.org](http://cotcbos.org).



**WANT TO JOIN COTC?** We'd love to welcome you as our newest member. Did you know we have three forms of membership at Church of the Covenant? Speak to pastors Rob or Joshua at any point, or email our Parish Administrator Nancy if you'd like to know more: [nancy.stockford@cotcbos.org](mailto:nancy.stockford@cotcbos.org).

**WALK FOR HUNGER ON MAY 5.** The season of fundraising walks and road races in the Back Bay (and elsewhere) has begun. The Walk for Hunger on **May 5** will affect traffic and parking. Please take that into account while planning your travel to church.

**UPCOMING WORSHIP.** Please join us each Sunday at 10:30 am and during the special services listed below as we come together in community to pray, sing, share celebrations and concerns, and hear God's still-speaking Word proclaimed in these hybrid services (in-person and Zoom options). [Zoom Link for each service.](#)

- Sunday, May 5: Rev. Joshua Lawrence Lazard preaching, Holy Communion, Sacred Reckonings Adult Ed. Part 3 After Worship
- Sunday, May 12: Rev. Kate Carlisle preaching, Continuing All-Church Book Discussion of *Transforming: The Bible & the Lives of Transgender Christians* After Worship
- Sunday, May 19: Pentecost, All-Ages Worship, Holy Communion

**OPEN SANCTUARY REOPENS ON MAY 10.** Starting on **May 10**, the Covenant sanctuary will be open to visitors on Fridays, Saturdays, and Mondays from 11:00 am to 3:00 pm and on Sundays from 1:00 pm to 5:00 pm. Last year, more than 13,000 visitors came through our doors from throughout the world to worship, seek shelter, and witness the beauty of our sanctuary. If you are interested in helping out this year, please contact Simone DeVito ([simone.t.devito@gmail.com](mailto:simone.t.devito@gmail.com)).

**COVENANT CABARET! Saturday, June 1, starting at 7:00 pm.** Come join us for this lively event with tasty refreshments and fun entertainment (music, poetry, storytelling, standup comedy, and whatever else YOU want to offer). More information to come. In the meantime, please **save the date**. The Cabaret is a fundraiser to support our sibling relationship with the Church of the Poor in Dulce Nombre de Jesús, Nicaragua.



**UPCOMING EXTENDED REFLECTION LEAVE FOR REV. ROB:** From May 1-September 12, Rob will be away on three months' Extended Reflection/Study Leave followed by four weeks of vacation and two weeks' unpaid leave. As sent out at the beginning of this year, Rob has shaped his leave around his ongoing love of the deep mystical roots of Celtic Christian spirituality: *The Sophia of Anam Cara: The Wisdom of Soul Connections*. Rob plans to use this leave to create space to breathe, be, and love more. He hopes this time will allow him and at times his family to pray for the life of our world and take stock of the enormous shifts that have happened and are happening in our world, the Church, and in their lives over these past six years—trusting that these months away may help him refocus, reflect, and refresh in the spirit of Sabbath and Jubilee. In order to continue the critical work of the gospel of Christ's love in these days where justice, peace, and liberation continue to be assaulted on so many fronts, some intentional reflection time comes as a timely balm. We are overjoyed that Rev. Joshua will shift from half-time Associate Pastor to full-time Lead Pastor during this reflection leave, ensuring us a smooth transition and pastoral continuity. This leave is not only a great opportunity for Rob and his family to find spiritual refreshment and grounding, it is also a gift for our entire congregation. We are invited to see this short "season" in the life of COTC not as reduced ministry, but as refreshed ministry. Before May 1, please feel free to be in touch with Rob ([rob.mark@cotcbos.org](mailto:rob.mark@cotcbos.org)) with any questions.

**WELCOME CHILDREN & YOUTH!!** We offer Christian education through Godly Play for ages 3-9, youth classes for ages 10-13 and 14+, and a nursery for the littlest ones. We welcome all children, youth, and families—those we know already and those who are here for the first time. If you need help finding us, please ask an usher. We share CYCE info regularly via email, so please email Rev. Kate at [kate.carlisle@cotcbos.org](mailto:kate.carlisle@cotcbos.org) if you want to receive updates!

**WEDNESDAY EVENING PRAYERS 6:00-6:30 pm.** Join us for our weekly Wednesday evening prayers with intentional liturgy, contemplative song, psalms, and sharing of prayers with our siblings from Newton Presbyterian [on Zoom](https://www.cotcbos.org) (link on <http://www.cotcbos.org>).

**BIBLE STUDY WEDNESDAYS.** Our weekly Bible Study meets on Wednesday mornings at 9:45 on Zoom. We are studying the Gospel of Mark. If you'd like more information or want to be on the list to get regular reminders and Zoom info, contact Jan Gough at [revjangough@gmail.com](mailto:revjangough@gmail.com).

**VIDEO CAMERAS/POSTING FULL SERVICE RECORDINGS.** To best serve our diverse community and new worshippers, we livestream and record each service, including Celebrations and Concerns. If you would prefer not to be in occasional camera shots, you are welcome to sit on the outside aisles on either side of the sanctuary. Recordings of each service are available on our [Worship Recordings Page](http://cotcbos.org/worship-recordings) ([cotcbos.org/worship-recordings](http://cotcbos.org/worship-recordings)).

**WEEKLY CALENDAR.** Click [here](http://cotcbos.org/calendar-of-events) ([cotcbos.org/calendar-of-events](http://cotcbos.org/calendar-of-events)) to view the weekly calendar of events.

*Church of the Covenant is focused on following Jesus in our world through accompaniment, compassion, peace, joy and creative beauty.*

*We are passionate about hospitality, committed to justice, and wild about faith.*

*We embrace an embodied spirituality that is not afraid of questions.*

*We advocate for a just climate for our earth, liberation in our world, and equality in our neighborhoods.*

*We are a community where ALL are welcome and celebrated as beautiful reflections of God –all genders, all faiths, all orientations, all backgrounds, all abilities, all ages, all struggles, and all hopes.*

*Come journey with us!*



*Visitor or Newcomer? Welcome to Church of the Covenant!*

We are glad you are here. Please let us know if there are ways we can help you connect to the church community. Learn more about the church by visiting our website at [www.cotcbos.org](http://www.cotcbos.org). To sign up for email updates about worship services and other events in our community, please fill out a visitor's card in your pew, or email us at [info@cotcbos.org](mailto:info@cotcbos.org).

**Parking Bargain** – Worshippers may park at the Back Bay Garage [Clarendon Street, between Boylston and St. James] on Sundays between 6:00 am and 9:00 pm for the first three (3) hours for only \$5. To get this discounted rate, please ask an usher before or after the worship service for a parking discount voucher.

**Prayers of Celebration or Concern May Be Shared in the Red Book** – At the rear of the Sanctuary is a red book where prayers that you wish to have spoken aloud during the Pastoral Prayer time may be written. The book will be available until the time of the offering.

**Time of Greeting** – After worship this morning, we hope that you will take a few minutes after going outside the sanctuary to connect with others worshipping with you, especially people you may not know as well.

**Hearing Assisted Devices** – **Speak with an usher** if you would like to use these devices that work with or without a hearing aid. These devices are specifically designed to work only with our sound system. Please remember to return the device at the close of the service. Thank you!

**Building Accessibility** – Our building includes an exterior ramp on Newbury Street and an elevator (in the Parish House part of the building) which allows access to the fellowship hall, meeting rooms, offices, and other parts of the building. We also have accessible rest rooms. Please ask an usher to help you locate these resources.



**Church of the Covenant**  
Boston Massachusetts

**67 Newbury St., Boston MA 02116 | (617) 266-7480 | [www.cotcbos.org](http://www.cotcbos.org)**

Worship at Church of the Covenant is the heart and soul of our life together as a community of faith. Since 1932 we have been a federated church, maintaining membership in the United Church of Christ and the Presbyterian Church (USA) and welcoming pilgrims from all traditions to our life and work. Through our prayer and praise, in our concerns and celebrations, by word and sacrament, art and silence, we seek empowerment, together and individually, as a covenant people, for the work of Christ.

Jesus taught that the Spirit invites all people, including society's outcasts, to enjoy seats at God's table. This congregation seeks to demonstrate that vision by welcoming individuals and families without regard to race, gender identity, age, physical/mental condition, or sexual orientation. We rejoice in the presence of children among us, and we strive to include them in our ministry. We maintain ties of faith with the Church of the Poor in the community of the Sweet Name of Jesus, in Northwestern Nicaragua.

We believe God's blessings are found in marriage equality for all. Thus, we joyfully welcome the opportunity afforded us by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, the United Church of Christ, and the Presbyterian Church USA to join couples of all sexual orientations in fully legal and holy marriage.

In our worship we use language and imagery that reflect the wonderful diversity of the image of God in humanity and all of creation; that transcend the exclusive language of the church's past. And as stewards, we seek to live into the Spirit's blessing as we move in solidarity on this shared and sacred, common home we call earth. We invite you to join us in the journey toward God's justice and peace for all of Boston and beyond!

#### **CHURCH STAFF**

Rev. Rob Mark, *Lead Pastor*

Rev. Joshua Lawrence Lazard, *Associate Pastor*

Thomas Handel, *Minister of Music*

Bill Brown, *Building Manager*

Rev. Kate Carlisle, *CYCE Coordinator*

Nancy Stockford, *Parish Administrator/Financial Secretary*

Jesús Vargas, *Sexton*

Alan Lane, *Food Cupboard Coordinator*

Venkatesh Balasubramanian, *Digital Communications & Audio Visual Tech Manager*

#### **CHURCH OFFICERS**

Kathryn Barry, *President of the Corporation*

Trudi Veldman, *Clerk of the Council*

Jon Schwarz, *Moderator of the Board of Deacons*

Faith Perry, *Treasurer*