



*Worship Celebration*  
**January 14, 2024**

*Twin Towers United Methodist Church*  
1411 Oak Street, Alameda, CA 94501

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# **WORSHIP GUIDE**

*Before you begin your time of worship, find a comfortable place to be and gather whatever you might need: your Bible, something to write on and with, your computer/connected device (if you intend to listen to music online), etc. Feel free to adapt this worship guide in any way that makes best sense to you and those you might be gathered with. (Consider inviting someone – a friend, a family member – to worship with you.) Commit to spending the next hour with God.*

**PRELUDE** – Listen and sing along to a song or hymn that blesses and centers your spirit.

## **CALL TO WORSHIP**

Leader: Sing praises to God, O you saints, and give thanks to God's holy name!

**All: We exalt you, O God, for you have restored us to life!**

Leader: We may cry through the night, but your joy comes in the morning.

**All: You hear us, O God, and you are gracious in our distress.**

Leader: You turn our mourning into dancing!

**All: Our souls cannot be silent! O God, our Savior, we give thanks to you for ever!**

**OPENING HYMN** – “Joyful Joyful” UMH 89

**SCRIPTURE READING** – **Philippians 4:4-7, 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, and Psalm 32: 1-2, 6, 11**  
NRSV

### **Philippians 4:4-7**

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

### **1 Thessalonians 15:16-18**

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

### **Psalm 32: 1-2, 6, 11**

1 Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. 2 Happy are those to whom the Lord imputes no iniquity and in whose spirit there is no deceit.

6 Therefore let all who are faithful offer prayer to you; at a time of distress, the rush of mighty waters shall not reach them.

11 Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, O righteous,  
and shout for joy, all you upright in heart.

**SERMON** – You can read Deacon Judith’s message manuscript starting [on page 4](#).

**ANTHEM OF RESPONSE** – “They’ll Know We Are Christians” TFWS 2223

**PRAYERS of the PEOPLE** – *Spend time in prayer. What did you hear for yourself through today’s scripture and reflection? Talk to God about it. Then lift up the joys and concerns that are in your heart. You might write them down, speak them aloud, or pray for them in silence.*

*We would be honored to pray with you and for you. Please send a note via text, mail, or email or give a call to our Healing Prayer Team.*

### **SHARING OUR GIFTS**

*How might you offer yourself and all that you have to God this week? How are you being invited to practice generosity? Spend a moment listening for God’s direction.*

*You are invited to contribute financially towards the purpose and ministry of TTUMC. We are a congregation committed to being conduits of God’s healing in our neighborhood and beyond, and in so doing, impact the last and the least. You can contribute by mailing in a check, dropping off cash, or giving online (visit <https://twintowersumc.org/give>).*

**CLOSING HYMN** – “Jesus, the Light of the World” W&S 3056 v. 1,3

### **BENEDICTION**

**POSTLUDE** - “Rise Up Shepherd and Follow” TFWS 2096

**NOW GO AND PASS CHRIST’S PEACE!**

# Rejoice Always??

Copyright by Rev. Dr. Judith Pruess-Mellow, 10-1-17, 12-31-23, 1-19-24

I have a very important question for you today: what makes us happy? what makes your heart sing? From the scriptures, Philippians 4 verses 4 through 6, we hear that we should rejoice always, that we should not be anxious about anything but bring our requests to God, always with a grateful heart. The apostle Paul gives very similar advice in First Thessalonians 5 verses 16 through 18, rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. These passages are saying, no matter what situation we find ourselves in, we can be happy because we place our values and our meaning of life in God. Research even shows that believing in God reduces anxiety. By following Paul's advice in Philippians 4:4-6, we WILL have peace of heart.

Paul, by the way, wrote these words to the Philippian church from prison, probably in Rome. The Philippian church was worried about him, and he was trying to reassure them. He used a form of the word rejoice 13 times in this section. Why would he speak of joy when he may have been about to die? For Paul, joy and comfort come from God. Even in the toughest situations, God is near us, and that nearness gives us comfort and joy, but we're human! We need more details on how to do this.

In a book for a small group study I was in a few years ago entitled Happy?, the author Matt Miosky writes, finding contentment in God prevents happiness from coming and going as times change. Miosky defines contentment as an abiding sense of peace, hope, and joy. He believes that the promise of scripture is that we can find this deep level of contentment and sustained joy independent of circumstances. The four keys to finding contentment and stable happiness, he says, are these: 1-we can live in the present, 2-be grateful, 3-change our perspectives, and 4-let go of control.

We see all four of these keys in the scriptures today: Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances. Thinking about the first key, living in the present, Steve Taddei of our Twin Towers United Methodist congregation recently related to me how, when he cannot fall asleep at night, he starts breathing deeply and concentrates on how very good it feels to be in his comfortable bed with warm blankets (it's winter now). He is filled with gratitude, which is the second key, but this is also a great example of living in the present. The practice of focusing on the sheer comfort of the moment enables him to relax and fall asleep.

We also need to learn how to structure our days so they are rich in meaning and joy producing activities. How we define our time defines who we are. There is no magical future. Today is our future. (Page 29). Father Henri Nouwen said it this way: Joy doesn't simply happen to us. We have to choose joy and keep choosing it every day.

The second key is gratitude. Some say that if you want to be happy, be grateful. The elderly John Wesley, just a few months shy of his 86<sup>th</sup> birthday, asked a crowd of Irish Methodists, for what end did God create humans? One simple lesson, John Wesley insisted, should be imprinted upon every human creature: you are made to be happy in God. What is the happiness for which humans were made? Wesley insisted that just as there is one God, so is there one happiness. This one happiness is the love of God and the love of neighbor. (I always like to add that the full commandment states that we should love our neighbor AS OURSELVES. In my work with seniors and their caregivers, I have realized the great importance of self-care.) Anyway, Wesley's one happiness is in two words,

gratitude and benevolence. Gratitude to our creator and benevolence to our fellow and sister creatures. Happiness is impossible without this grateful love of God and benevolence, active love toward others and ourselves. We might put it this way: We need to be aware of how God has been and is alongside us, and we need to be in community.

Can we be grateful for everything? Not war, climate change, violence, drug addiction, oppression, COVID, loss of friends and family. While we can't be grateful for everything, we can be grateful for every opportunity given to us to experience joy. Most of the time, there is an opportunity to enjoy something. Even today, in spite of our grave concerns for our world and the Middle East, we can still be grateful that we're gathered in a community of faith based on the BIG hunch that life with God is better than life without God. Furthermore, with all the problems in the world, we have countless opportunities for service, and perhaps the reality of climate change makes us appreciate the beauty of nature even more. We don't see these opportunities sometimes because we are rushing through life or just not paying attention.

Much of this has to do with the third key, an ability to change our perspective. When we get a new perspective, sometimes we can see the same circumstance in an entirely new way (Page 85). Etty Hillesum, a Jewish victim of the genocide during WWII in which many self-described Christians took part, provides us with an excellent example of changing our perspective. Her journals portray a person in the midst of a hostile world. As she prays to God from the Westerbork concentration camp where she was detained before her transport to Auschwitz where she died at 29, she clearly perceives the beauty and terror of the world. She is somehow lifted into true life. She wrote, "All I want to say is this. The misery here is quite terrible; and yet, late at night when the day has slunk away into the depths behind me, I often walk with a spring in my step along the barbed wire... And then time and again, it soars straight from heart—I can't help it, that's just the way it is—like some elementary force, the feeling that life is glorious and magnificent, and that one day we shall be building a whole new world." She wanted to be the "thinking heart" of her community, and she still is that for us.

Amanda Gorman, a prominent young black poet, has written something similar: "There is always Light, if only we are brave enough to see it. There is always Light, if we are brave enough to be it.

The fourth key is letting go of control. It's really hard. We will normally do anything to keep some old thing or some old way from falling apart, yet this is when we need patience and guidance, and the freedom to let go instead of tightening our control (Richard Rohr). Part of the ability to let go is having a community of folks you can count on. Current research shows that one in five adults and one in three young adults live with loneliness and mental health challenges (Dee Eastman, *The Daniel Plan—40 Days to a Healthier Life*).

Now, to tell you the truth, I have found that all of these recommendations are sometimes easier said than done. For example, when I was in the position of taking care of my late husband for 2 ½ years after his stroke in 2012 and during his final days which were full of suffering due to cancer, I had a very hard time living in the present, being grateful, changing my perspective, letting go of control. However, friends inside and outside of the church community encouraged me to go places and do things with them that reminded me that somehow I would get through this. It was very hard for me to grasp at the time that God was really in this somewhere, but somehow my friends gave me hope.

I was happy when I was in my community of faith because it gave me an experience of belonging.

Church gave me a place to do service, to observe the Sabbath, and to enjoy scripture study, religious music and art. We CAN make a difference in our communities. One person whose wife had become completely debilitated by MS said that the edge was taken off the awfulness of the situation because they were together in community. Their community of faith made the pain possible to bear. Sometimes there are no solutions; we just have to live with the questions, and this is easier in community (Shannon Gilbride email, January 13, 2024).

Two of the most powerful spokespersons about the importance of community to happiness and joy are the Dalai Lama and the late Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa. In talking about how he was able to maintain joy in the face of the suffering of apartheid, Desmond Tutu said, I have certainly been helped by many people. One of the good things is realizing that you are not a solitary cell. You are part of a wonderful community. You open, you blossom, really because of other people. And I think some suffering... is a necessary ingredient for life, certainly for developing compassion (The Book of Joy, Page 43).

When natural and man made disasters make us feel as if the ground has dropped out from under us, it seems impossible to rejoice always. Of course, I am grateful to be alive, for my health, food, shelter, family, including church family, and friends. We here in the Bay Area should feel especially grateful, since we live in one of the best areas in California and in the US. But witnessing the suffering of so many in our world has broken my heart open. I get it about praying continually, as I do pray continually that the spirit will ease the suffering and show each one of us how to ease the suffering. However, while God does not cause suffering, tragedies do make us more compassionate. They cause us to discern how we ourselves can make God's love manifest in the world. It is in our response to suffering that God is found.

Rabbi Harold Kushner, in *When Bad Things Happen To Good People* (1981), offers a poem (by Jack Reimer) that speaks to this: (I am paraphrasing some of it). We cannot merely pray to you, O God, to end war, for we know that you have made the world in a way that we might find our own path to peace within ourselves and our neighbors... we cannot merely pray to you, O God, to end [the] despair [of the poor], for you have already given us the power to clear away slums and to give hope if we would only use our power justly (Pages 130 through 131).

Since it is Human Relations Sunday..."The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good people to do nothing." "To ignore evil is to become an accomplice to it."

I just ran across a book at the Senior Center Library, *A Mother's Reckoning* by Sue Klebold (2016) (April 20, 1999)...She says that she is convinced that God sends us love on earth through the actions of people who stand by us (Page 86). Out of tragedies, we experience the blessing of community and opportunities to serve. After many years of dealing with the aftermath trauma, Sue got involved with brain illness and mental health efforts, because she had come to realize that in the last months of his life, Dylan had turned his back on a lifetime of moral education, empathy, and his own conscience. She says, "Everything I have learned supports my belief that he was not in his right mind" (Page 263). "When we can do a better job of helping people BEFORE their lives are in crisis, the world will become safer for all of us" a(Page 80).

Some of us have a zoom call once a month with a man who lives in the West Bank village of Wadi Foquin. He is full of fear all the time, because of the war and violence from the settlers. However, he

is sustained to a large extent by our prayers and actions in support of their survival.

John Wesley wrote that suffering is “entirely contrary to God’s own nature, and so destructive of God’s noblest works.” Suffering is not punishment for sin. We suffer and the world suffers because we are human and part of a system of processes and a physical environment where things can go wrong. But, God is with us through it all. God loves humanity and desires good for us, and God depends on us to help!

God works incredible good out of unspeakable tragedies, and God does not orchestrate tragedies. God is in the middle of everything, working for good (Paul Young, *The Shack*). Sometimes we ask, why doesn’t God prevent evil? In the book, *The Shack*, the father of a murdered girl wonders why a good and powerful God failed to stop evil. He gets the answer that first and foremost, we should accept that God loves us. This is the central idea of another book, *God Can’t* (Thomas J. Oord, Page 39). “In fact, believing God loves us, others, and all creation is the most important idea of our lives.” The thing is that God’s love is uncontrolling.

An uncontrolling God works lovingly to the utmost in every situation, even with diseases like MS and Parkinson’s, in situations like Columbine and all the awful school shootings afterwards, in the horrifying violence of Auschwitz and now in the Holy Land. God cannot control God’s creatures. If we think of God as a loving parent, we realize that God expresses a loving influence that neither overrules or withdraws. No micromanagement or iron fists there! I should add that I do believe that though God does not control us, God does work miracles and healing, and that intercessory prayer is important for several reasons but that is a topic for another time. (Use Marjorie Hewitt Suchoki, *In God’s Presence*, and Larry Dossey, *Healing Words*.)

We have moral agency. Every person has agency to act in loving or unloving ways. In tragic situations, we can be extensions of God’s presence, agents of healing, working to restore order to lives and communities. For this we CAN rejoice.

In closing, neither Desmond Tutu nor the Dalai Lama in their *Book of Joy* advocate fleeting happiness that requires only positive states and banishes feelings like sadness. Think of how helpful the Lament Psalms are to each of us when we are despondent. The kind of happiness they describe is characterized by self understanding, growth, and acceptance including life’s inevitable suffering and sadness..

When asked the question, how do you find joy in the midst of so many large world problems, Tutu said, you show your humanity by how you see yourself not as apart from others but from your connection to others. I have frequently wept about the world’s problems, he says (Page 115).

If these two men that have seen so much suffering can say this, if Etty Hillesum at Westerbork and Ata in the West Bank can talk the way they do, and if the Apostle Paul with his ministry challenges can write rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances, certainly we can give it our best effort. And the best is, God is with us. Amen.

Please join me in praying for our world:

Creator God, who made our world, all creatures and people, we pray especially today for all the children of Abraham, particularly those in the Holy Land. We pray for all people in the path of

harm—keep them safe; for all those who have died in conflict—comfort those who mourn; for an end to violence, oppression, prejudice, and injustice—help us walk in the footsteps of Martin Luther King Jr; for an end to all wars—bring about a just and lasting peace. Help us, we pray with our spirits groaning, to be workers for the peace and happiness of all.

Sometimes we find ourselves in the shoes of the Psalmist, who in Psalm 70 (verse 5) cries, “Come to me, O God, for I am poor and afflicted. Help us to understand that personal poverty and affliction can be GRACES. Help us to realize first, they may be the one sure claim we have to your help, for You have demonstrated in scripture your compassion and preference for the poor and marginalized, the sick and oppressed. Help us also to understand that we may sometimes be poor and afflicted, and this helps us identify with, listen to, and perhaps support those who are suffering. Guide us so that in any situation we can learn how to be more effective. Enable us to see what you have provided to help us. Prod us to ask what we have been given in our need that we should be giving to others.

God, we know You are present in time, OUR time, and in space, OUR space. We know You care for our souls, for our well-being, and for our world. Inspired by the words of ETTY HILLESUM, I pray, O God, let us not reserve the space inside us for hatred and thoughts of revenge. Help us to see that life is still beautiful and rich. We thank You, God, for our lives, for the world, and for Jesus who taught us the Way and how to pray, Our Father... Amen.

(Or, In all the Holy Names of God.)



# Announcements and Invitations

## NEED HELP WITH GROCERIES?

Everyone needs a little help now and then.  
When you do, we're here.

To learn more go to:  
[www.alamedafoodbank.org/get-food](http://www.alamedafoodbank.org/get-food)  
or scan the QR code below.



Whether you need help once a week,  
once a month, or once a year, long term  
or short term, we're here for you  
with healthy and nutritious food.



*Share the invitation*



## Choir Rehearsal

Wednesday  
5:00 p.m.



# Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service

*'Life's most persistent and urgent question is: What are you doing for others?'*  
-Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

East Bay Parks is hosting volunteer projects at the following MLK Shoreline Locations:

- Shoreline Cleanup at Tidewater Boating Center
- Gardening and Maintenance at MLK Grove
- Shoreline Cleanup at Oakport Staging Area

Register online:

[https://ebrpd.samaritan.com/custom/501/opp\\_details/8588](https://ebrpd.samaritan.com/custom/501/opp_details/8588)

The Museum of the African Diaspora (MoAD) will celebrate the national observance of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday as a Day of Service, providing FREE admission to the museum and programs throughout the day.

Monday, January 15, 2024 - 11a - 5p

**Registration Encouraged:**

<https://www.moadsf.org/event/dr-martin-luther-king-jr-national-day-of-service-free-admission>



Ruby Broobs Marquez, MLK Jr., 2018. Digital photo collage. Courtesy of the artist.



# DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION

4:30 p.m. on Monday, Jan. 15, 2024

Reed L. Buffington Visual & Performing Arts Center on the Chabot College campus

The event is open to the public and will not require a ticket.



**KEYNOTE SPEAKER: PROFESSOR SILVESTER HENDERSON**



Twin Towers United Methodist Church with Alameda Friends & Family for Ceasefire invite you to a conversation with

## Rabbi David J. Cooper with Kehilla Community Synagogue on the War in Israel/Palestine

Zoom - Registration Link:  
[https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZMpceGuqzgjHdBvY1n5b\\_PJEhcfQGI3o3Ge](https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZMpceGuqzgjHdBvY1n5b_PJEhcfQGI3o3Ge)

**WEDNESDAY, JAN. 17, 2024**  
**6:00 pm**

**In-Person**  
Twin Towers United Methodist Church  
1411 Oak Street, Alameda, CA



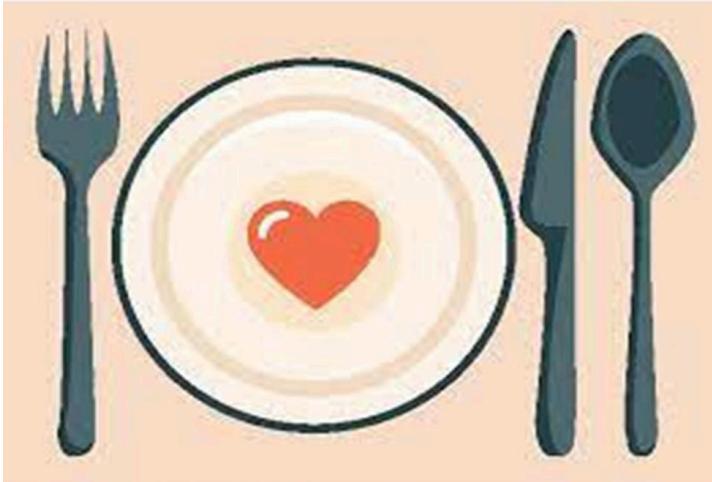
David Cooper is Rabbi Emeritus of Kehilla Community Synagogue in the Oakland Piedmont area. He co-founded the synagogue with Rabbi Burt Jacobson in 1984. It was dedicated to a progressive vision of social activism inspired by the writings of the Hebrew prophets. Rabbi David grew up surrounded by traditions in the Conservative, and the Orthodox Jewish movements. He grew up in a Zionist family and first visited Israel/Palestine just after the 1967 war. During the next 56 years, he has supported equal rights and dignity for all Israelis and Palestinians and has been active against the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza.

@TTUMCALAMEDA @alameda4ceasefire



**REGISTER FOR ZOOM MEETING USING THIS LINK:**  
[https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZMpceGuqzgjHdBvY1n5b\\_PJEhcfQGI3o3Ge](https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZMpceGuqzgjHdBvY1n5b_PJEhcfQGI3o3Ge)

# Volunteers Needed for December Dine & Connect Monday, February 5



Help us prepare and serve  
135 meals for our  
neighbors!

### Shifts:

12 p.m.- 4 p.m. - Cooking & Plating  
4 p.m.- 5:30 p.m. Serving & Cleaning Up

Sign-up to help us prepare and serve 135 meals for our neighbors: [DandC Volunteer Sign Up.docx](#)

# Alameda Warming Shelter at Twin Towers UMC Church Gym

## February 19 – March 2

