



Gifted & Entrusted II

October 18th, 2020

Twin Towers United Methodist Church

1411 Oak Street, Alameda, CA 94501

510.522.6744 ** twintowers.office@gmail.com ** www.twintowersumc.org

WORSHIP GUIDE

Before you begin your time of worship, find a comfortable place to be and gather whatever you might need: your Bible, some paper or a notebook, something to write 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!

WELCOME – Welcome to this time of worship! You are invited to pause for a moment and consider: *When was the last time you experienced awe in the presence of creation? When have you encountered beauty or gift in and through creation?* Go back to the moment and remember the scene. When you are ready, take a deep breath in, letting the awe, wonder, and beauty you experienced fill you once more.

OPENING HYMN - “This Is God’s Wondrous World”

Listen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=18NcOpJ8x8U>

This is God's wondrous world, and to my listening ears,
All nature sings, and round me rings the music of the spheres.
This is God's wondrous world, I rest me in the thought
Of rocks and trees, of skies and seas,
God's hand the wonders wrought.

This is God's wondrous world, the birds their carols raise,
The morning light, the lily white, declare their maker's praise.
This is God's wondrous world. God shines in all that's fair,
In the rustling grass or mountain pass,
God's voice speaks everywhere.

This is God's wondrous world. O let me ne'er forget
That though the wrong seems oft so strong. God is the ruler yet.

This is God's wondrous world: why should my heart be sad?
Let voices sing, O let the heavens ring!
God reigns, let earth be glad.

OPENING PRAYER – *You are invited to take a deep breath as you pray:*

This is your wondrous world, O God,
and we give thanks - great thanks - for all the ways we catch sight of your presence and
glory through it.

We give thanks for the wide sky and the blessed sun,
for the salt sea and the running water,
for the green springtime hills and the never-resting winds,
for flowers of every color and the common grass underfoot.

We thank you for our senses by which we hear the song of birds
and see the splendour of the summer fields, by which we taste the autumn fruits,
and rejoice in the feel of the snow, and smell the breath of spring.

Grant us a heart wide open to all this beauty;
and save our souls from being so blind that we pass unseeing
when even the common thorn bush is aflame with your glory,
O God, our creator, who lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.

—*Adapted from prayer written by Walter Rauschenbusch (1861–1918)*

SCRIPTURE - Genesis 1:1-2, 20-31 / NRSV

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, ² the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.

²⁰ And God said, “Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky.” ²¹ So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind. And God saw that it was good. ²² God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.” ²³ And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

²⁴ And God said, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind.” And it was so. ²⁵ God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good.

²⁶ Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”

²⁷ So God created humankind in his image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

²⁸ God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.” ²⁹ God said, “See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. ³⁰ And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so. ³¹ God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

This is the Word of God for the people of God. **Thanks be to God!**

LISTEN - When the pandemic hit, some 9 months ago, and the world began to shelter in place, people started noticing some interesting changes. In those early months, so much came to a stand still as people huddled in their homes: roadways cleared (gone were the days of bumper to bumper traffic), airplanes remained grounded (there was a 96% drop in air travel!), industries came to a halt. And what people began noticing was this:

- Blue skies - something we take for granted, perhaps, here in the Bay Area - appeared in places described as having “dangerous levels” of air pollution, as “shrouded in toxic, throat-searing clouds of brown smog”: notably Beijing in China, Delhi in India. But also in 336 other Chinese cities, in Milan, Italy, Jakarta, Indonesia, Islamabad, Pakistan. and our neighbor, Los Angeles!

- Clear water - in the famous canals of Venice, Italy that were always muddied, and in Vembanad Lake, the longest lake in India, in all major rivers in India really, and even in our own San Francisco Bay.
- Wildlife began appearing in the most unexpected places: dolphins in the harbor of Trieste, Italy, Pumas in downtown Santiago, Chile, wild boars in Barcelona and Bergamo, peacocks strutting through Bangor, Wales, goats and sheep wandering through roundabouts and deserted playgrounds in Monmouthshire, and right here, coyotes wandering along the Golden Gate Bridge. But even in their homes, wildlife began thriving - the bear population at Yosemite, for example, is said to have quadrupled. One ranger described them as “having a party” in the absence of humans.
- And then the singing, birds singing, to be exact. The shutdown literally turned down the volume of life and we could hear, for the first time in a long time, the glorious singing of birds, all kinds of birds. Have you noticed this?

It wouldn't be a stretch to say that as human life came to a standstill, the rest of creation took a deep breath, stretched out, and came alive again. No wonder, a recent letter to the editor of the LA Times began like this, “One of the biggest lessons learned in this pandemic is that [humankind] is the most damaging of all the invasive species on this planet.” It's hard to disagree with that sentiment, especially as we look around and recognize the destruction and danger that creation is currently facing. Just a few weeks ago, “The Climate Clock” was installed in Manhattan's Union Square. It's an installation to count down the time we have left before an irreversible climate emergency altars human existence as we know it. On Sept 21 at 1:30 p.m., the clock read: 7 years, 101 days, 17 hours, 29 minutes and 22 seconds. How did we get here, Friends? How did we go from being entrusted with the utterly magnificent gift of creation...to being accused of being its destroyer and annihilator? Is this what God had in mind when God gave the gift, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth”? If not, where do we go from here - individually and collectively - as we seek to be faithful stewards of God's good gift, partners in enabling creation's flourishing?

I want to say at the outset that the creation story we read today is not a scientific statement, nor one from which a scientific statement can be made. If anything, the creation story is a theological statement, one that seeks to tell us something about God, about the world, and about

ourselves. We would do well, should we find ourselves confused about this, to remember that Genesis contains two, not one, two creation stories, and that they are different, one from the other. But what is it that is being communicated? What might those early storytellers been wanting to make clear?

Before I get into that it is important to know that this creation story is also very different from the other creation stories that were known and told at the time. The Israelites would have been familiar with the creation stories of other ancient near eastern cultures, namely the stories of the Egyptians, the Babylonians, the Mesopotamians, and even the Greeks. What these other stories all had in common was the multiplicity of gods involved, and creation happening out of great tension and often violence. Moreover, human beings, if included in the stories at all, were almost always created to be a “cheap labor pool”, perfect for doing the “menial work” of the lesser gods. The story told in Genesis comes in total contrast.

“In the beginning, God - Yahweh - created the heavens and the earth, ‘not by struggling, or fighting, or mating, or collaborating with other beings, but simply by speaking.’” God spoke creation into existence. God is clearly the main character here: God created, God spoke, God saw, and God blessed. Our story is a profound reminder that all things come from God. All things belong to God. Moreover, God delighted in creation. Throughout the story, we hear again and again this refrain: “And God saw that it was good.” In fact, right before God rests, “God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.” (Gen 1:31). Stop and breathe that in for a moment. What good news, Friends, to know that that which God created is a delight to God. This is a story then about our God, who is Creator and Source of all, about creation and its inherent goodness, and it’s about us.

We, who are made in the image of God, according to God’s likeness, are blessed with these words, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over [it]....” And this is where we seem to have run into trouble. It’s as if we heard that blessing and took off running, never looking back. Subdue the earth? Check! Have dominion, or rather dominate the rest of creation? No problem. Over the course of human history, we’ve consistently ensured that creation bends to serve us. Those who refuse or don’t participate in this are pushed further and further towards the margins. I’m afraid the letter writer wasn’t wrong: we are indeed a damaging, and even deadly, invasive species.

Much has been written about what “subdue” and “dominion” means and how we might best live into their righteous meaning, but I want to invite you instead to simply hold on to what came before the blessing: “God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them.” That is some thought to take in, Friends, not only that we are good, but that we somehow reflect God, that God’s imprint is on us. Taken seriously, wouldn’t that mean that we must reflect or mirror God’s care for and delight in creation? Taken seriously, wouldn’t that mean we would do all in our power to protect creation and ensure its thriving and well being? Taken seriously, wouldn’t that mean we would hold sacred each other as bearers of the divine image?

Wouldn’t it make sense that as people rooted in this beautiful and powerful creation story, that we would, that Christians would lead the way to protect the planet and preserve the environment? We would do so to honor our Creator God, to share in God’s delight and care for God’s creation, and to allow God to shine forth in us. So what might that look like, Friends? What might it look like to take seriously God’s gift that we’ve been entrusted with? Please take a moment to note down something you are already doing to serve and protect creation. Now consider something that you’d like to do to strengthen your care and commitment to creation? We can and must all do our individual part in this work. We must also harness our collective voice and power to do the same. Might we consider becoming a green church? How about raising our collective voices against the increase in fracking that is happening in California? There is much that we can do together! It is my prayer that as we continue to journey through this pandemic, we would heed the invitations that creation has extended: blue skies, clear water, the presence of wildlife, and the singing of birds - and in them hear the voice of God singing in delight, “This is my wondrous world!” Amen.

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 them in silence.*

I would be honored to pray with you and for you.

Please send a note via text, mail, or email or give me a call if I can do so.

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 via PayPal (visit www.twintowersumc.org). Take a moment and do that now.

CLOSING HYMN - “God of Wonders”, W&S 3034

Listen here: <https://youtu.be/3WnsOaSQ7Pc>

1. Lord of all creation,
of water, earth, and sky,
the heavens are your tabernacle;
Glory to the Lord on high.

Hallelujah to the Lord of heaven and
earth (x3)

Holy, holy (*repeat as inspired*)

Refrain

God of wonders beyond our galaxy,
you are holy, holy!
The universe declares your majesty;
you are holy, holy!
Lord of heaven and earth (x2)

2. Early in the morning

I will celebrate the light,
when I stumble in the darkness
I will call your name by night.

BENEDICTION - May we always walk gently upon the Earth, in right relationship, nurtured by God’s love, open to the wind of the Spirit, taking only what we need, open to the needs of others, making choices that bring wellbeing, living with generosity, striving for justice, honouring all with reverence, reconciling and peacemaking, mindful of those who will come after, recognising our proper place as part of God’s creation. May God grant us the strength and courage, for such a radical transformation into Their Kingdom. Amen.

~ From Christian Ecology Blog

NOW GO AND PASS CHRIST’S PEACE!



If you are on Facebook, please like and follow our page:
<https://www.facebook.com/tumcAlameda/>