



World Communion Sunday
October 4th, 2020

Joint Worship with Chinese Community UMC & Lake Merritt UMC

Twin Towers United Methodist Church

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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, some paper or a notebook, something to write with, your computer/connected device (if you intend to listen to music online), etc. As this is World Communion Sunday, you may want to have some kind of bread and wine, water or juice, to remind you of sharing a meal at God's table. 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: Kyrie Eleison (from New World Symphony)

Listen: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jMIUhiIj85s>

CALL TO WORSHIP –

When the world seems full of division,

Great Creator, make us one.

When it's hard to love our neighbor,

Great Creator, make us one.

When walls and borders separate us,

Great Creator, make us one.

When we close ourselves off to others,

Great Creator, make us one.

When we get it right,

Great Creator, make us one.

When we come together,

Great Creator, make us one.

When we are reminded we are part of something bigger than ourselves,

Great Creator, make us one.

When we ask others to join us at this table,

Great Creator, make us one.

OPENING HYMNS - "Make Us One" TFWS 2224

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

Make us one, Lord, make us one;
Holy Spirit, make us one.
Let your love flow
so the world will know
we are one in you.

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

Gathering God, joined as one body we come to worship you today,
mindful of the breathing of the life that you have called into being
across countries and climates; all creatures and all creeds.

Jesus, teacher friend, today you call us to your table and invite us to feed on you,
so that we might then feed others.

Let our hunger for justice and our desire for peace
never be exhausted until all your children are safe and fed.

Life-giving Spirit, let the words that reach our open ears and your movement in our souls
in this time together bless, comfort and disturb us.

So that the work of your people here may be directed along the right paths
for the sake of the world. And all the people say: Amen. (Source: Rev. Jennie Gordon)

SCRIPTURE - Isaiah 5:1-7; Matthew 21:33-46 (the MSG)

¹⁻² I'll sing a ballad to the one I love,
a love ballad about his vineyard:
The one I love had a vineyard,
a fine, well-placed vineyard.
He hoed the soil and pulled the weeds,
and planted the very best vines.
He built a lookout, built a winepress,
a vineyard to be proud of.
He looked for a vintage yield of grapes,

but for all his pains he got junk grapes.
³⁻⁴ "Now listen to what I'm telling you,
you who live in Jerusalem and Judah.
What do you think is going on
between me and my vineyard?
Can you think of anything I could have done
to my vineyard that I didn't do?
When I expected good grapes,
why did I get bitter grapes?"

⁵⁻⁶ “Well now, let me tell you
what I’ll do to my vineyard:
I’ll tear down its fence
and let it go to ruin.
I’ll knock down the gate
and let it be trampled.
I’ll turn it into a patch of weeds, untended,
uncared for—
thistles and thorns will take over.
I’ll give orders to the clouds:

‘Don’t rain on that vineyard, ever!’”
⁷ Do you get it? The vineyard of
God-of-the-Angel-Armies
is the country of Israel.
All the men and women of Judah
are the garden he was so proud of.
He looked for a crop of justice
and saw them murdering each other.
He looked for a harvest of righteousness
and heard only the moans of victims.

³³⁻³⁴ “Here’s another story. Listen closely. There was once a man, a wealthy farmer, who planted a vineyard. He fenced it, dug a winepress, put up a watchtower, then turned it over to the farmhands and went off on a trip. When it was time to harvest the grapes, he sent his servants back to collect his profits.

³⁵⁻³⁷ “The farmhands grabbed the first servant and beat him up. The next one they murdered. They threw stones at the third but he got away. The owner tried again, sending more servants. They got the same treatment. The owner was at the end of his rope. He decided to send his son. ‘Surely,’ he thought, ‘they will respect my son.’

³⁸⁻³⁹ “But when the farmhands saw the son arrive, they rubbed their hands in greed. ‘This is the heir! Let’s kill him and have it all for ourselves.’ They grabbed him, threw him out, and killed him.

⁴⁰ “Now, when the owner of the vineyard arrives home from his trip, what do you think he will do to the farmhands?”

⁴¹ “He’ll kill them—a rotten bunch, and good riddance,” they answered. “Then he’ll assign the vineyard to farmhands who will hand over the profits when it’s time.”

⁴²⁻⁴⁴ Jesus said, “Right—and you can read it for yourselves in your Bibles:

The stone the masons threw out
is now the cornerstone.

This is God’s work;
we rub our eyes, we can hardly believe it!

“This is the way it is with you. God’s kingdom will be taken back from you and handed over to a people who will live out a kingdom life. Whoever stumbles on this Stone gets shattered; whoever the Stone falls on gets smashed.”

⁴⁵⁻⁴⁶ When the religious leaders heard this story, they knew it was aimed at them. They wanted to arrest Jesus and put him in jail, but, intimidated by public opinion, they held back. Most people held him to be a prophet of God.

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

REFLECT - “World Communion in the Face of Public Opinion”, Rev. Pam Kurtz

In 1933 Shadyside Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh kickstarted what eventually became World Communion Sunday. Seven years later in 1940, the Federal Council of Churches (now the National Council of Churches) adopted and practiced it on the first Sunday in October and that practice has continued now in many Christian churches for 80 years. More than half of us grew up post-World Communion Sunday adoption and practice.

And yet, many of us would ask, “Why is World Communion Sunday so important? Why is this practice, this symbol so important? In the simplest of terms, because we preach Christian unity more than we practice it. Some will ask, “Why not just unity Pastor Pam?” Well, like Shadyside Presbyterian Church, let’s start smaller – with Christians – who have common foundational beliefs, including the almost universal Christian practice of breaking bread with one another and remembering both the night of Jesus’ betrayal and of Jesus’ sacrifice.

Once a year, we intentional recognize and speak of the world-wide practice in Christendom, - the Lord’s Supper - of breaking bread in different languages, with different traditions and customs, and various forms of liturgy.

And, World Communion Sunday also calls us to recognize that we do preach Christian unity more than we practice it. We do whether privately or publicly decide whether someone is a Christian or not, whether they have taken the necessary steps or courses, or said the right words to be deemed a Christian. We, maybe unwittingly have decided we are now in charge of who is in and who is out who we ask about their faith story and who we tell our own faith story. I have committed this sin too often, and if I am to be honest not repented just as often. More than ever it seems, at least in the public or social square, it is like that not simply in deciding who’s a Christian; it is more so like that in most everything now. Who decides who gets adequate food, adequate housing, adequate health care, to be adequately treated as a human being; who decides even what is adequate?

This practice unfortunately is as old as the human race. Isaiah wrote about it long before Jesus wrote about it.

Isaiah’s story comes in rather poetic form with the imagery of cultivating a vineyard much like cultivating a personal relationship. While we know the ending by reading it, those who would

have heard it evolving as it developed would see it was turning sour, but would not know the ending – quite frankly, until the ending. As Isaiah (or rather the suitor/vinedresser) asks near the end, what should happen now, the audience begins to feel uneasy and embarrassed. Is the one being pursued not free to resist this pursuer’s pressing advances? What is that person’s side of the story? Is there more to this song than meets the ear? Or does the average person who has been disappointed in love identify closely with the instinct for violent vengeance expressed in the declarations of excessive intent? Who can issue commands to the rain clouds? What is going on?

All becomes clear in verse 7. The song was one about the relationship between Yahweh and Israel/Judah. You see, those grapes that are growing up sour and small are the people of Judah and Israel. The prophet explains that the vineyard represents the people of Israel and Judah and that the Lord is the keeper of the vineyard. The Lord deeply cared for the people and lavished on them the Lord’s grace and love, expecting justice and righteousness as God taught and showed them, as the appropriate fruits. Instead of justice and righteousness, the people have responded with bloodshed, which has elicited a cry of distress from the downtrodden. They can’t produce anything except that which feeds only themselves and which ultimately causes self-consumption making them, as we now know vulnerable to outside aggressions.

You know, as well as me, this poetic song did not go over well. Not only do the leaders not want to hear this, the people do not want to be seen as sour, self-consumed, tiny in their thinking and action. They want the public opinion to favor them, to laud them so that they can continue to pursue their own ways, directly in the face of God’s call to live as God commanded them to live.

Jesus also shares a parable about a vineyard as well. This time it is not about the vinedresser/ the Lord, but the tenants of the land leased to by the owner. Now we must know that many of the hearers of this parable knew of Isaiah’s poem, so you can imagine they expect to hear something similar yet find the story ever changing. Still they do not know how it will end.

These folks also put up a wall – to decide who’s in and who’s out; they put up a watchtower to ready themselves to keep folks out if they decide to or allow folks in if they decide to and they build a vat to process all the produce. The story is much more direct, much more blatant in its indictments. Servants – the prophets are killed, and the son of the vineyard owner – Jesus not

simply killed, he is thrown out first, then killed. Ironic that what we hear at the end is that the rulers wanted to kill Jesus, but public opinion was not in their favor.

The leaders and those that are complicit with the leaders – in actions and inaction are indicted. There is no way to avoid this message.

We must note there is one very important thing that is missing in the wok of the vineyard. Just look back at it and see you if you find the missing item.

Tony Campolo tells the story of a great oil refinery. This refinery was huge. It employed all the modern techniques of chemical engineering. It was an impressive structure that was very well kept up. The interior was bright and shining. The workers were proud to be part of such a company. They made sure that the plant was clean and everything was in perfect working order. In fact the oil refinery soon gained a world-wide reputation. One day, some visitors asked to have a tour of the oil refinery. There was a reluctance at first to allow any guests. The visitors insisted. They had traveled a distance and wanted to tour the facility. The plant manager contacted his boss who reluctantly gave permission for the visitors to tour the plant.

The visitors walked through the vast chambers where they saw the processing petroleum, the gleaming pipes that carried the petroleum products from place to place, and the extensive organizational system that had been set in place to keep the refinery going. The visitors were impressed. Near the close one of them asked the guide if they might be permitted to see the shipping department. “What shipping department?” asked the guide clearly confused.

“Why, the shipping department from whence you ship out all the gasoline and oil you process here,” said the tourists. “We don’t have any shipping department,” answered the guide. “You see, all the energy products produced in this refinery are used up keeping the refinery going.”

Whether we are talking about listening to and sharing and finding a common thread of faith, politics, social, racial, economic justice, if we are listening only to or predominantly to the public opinions of those like us, we will fail to share the abundance of God’s vineyard – that every person is a human being like you, with all the basic needs and rights as you.

One of my greatest joys in this season of online worship is seeing and knowing that each person is using their own drink for the cup of forgiveness and each person is using their own morsel as

the bread of life. And it is very much one Lord's Supper. This is one of those acts of the very radical love and very scary grace of God.

God's love subverts our many tribalisms and idols that demand sacrifices from us. It is such radically inclusive grace that it is dangerous. It is dangerous to the call of exclusion, humans deciding who is in and who is out. But that's the call of the kingdom that Jesus announced.

A meal, that richly symbolic act in Scripture whereby we accept, bless, and honor one another is a foundation of our faith. Jay Bakker writes in his book, *Faith, Doubt, and Other Lines I've Crossed Walking With the Unknown God*, "We ought to be become outcasts by befriending outcasts.... We should be ridiculed for hanging out with the ridiculous. We should be known for irrational grace. Irrational forgiveness." When we live this radical inclusion we are saying, "This person's a real human being. A person, just like you and me."

In response to a letter from his brother, Wendall Berry wrote in his book *New Collected Poems* (2012):

Dear John, You said, "Treat your worst enemies as if they could become your best friends."

You were not the first to perpetrate such an outrage, but you were right.

Try as we might, we cannot unspring that trap. We can either befriend our enemies or we can die with them, in the absolute triumph of the absolute horror constructed by us to save us from them.

Tough, but "All right," our Mary said, "we'll be nice to the sons of bitches."

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.

*Today, we also invite your 2nd mile giving towards the special **Wold Communion Sunday Offering**, an opportunity to fund scholarships for ethnic and ethnic minority scholars and seminarians pursuing a vocation to change the world and the church. Take a moment and do that now. You can contribute by mailing in a check, dropping off cash, or giving online via PayPal (visit www.twintowersumc.org). Please indicate your special designation.*

CLOSING HYMN - “Vamos Todos al Banquete (Let Us Go Now to the Banquet)”

Listen: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YjzNq_95jXU

Refrain:

Let us go now to the banquet,
to the feast of the universe.

The table's set and a place is waiting;
come, ev'ry-one, with your gifts to
share.

1. I will rise in the early morning;
the community's waiting for me.
With a spring in my step I'm walking
with my friends and my family.

Refrain

2. God invites all the poor and hungry
to the banquet of justice and good
where the harvest will not be hoarded
so that no one will lack for food.

Refrain

3. May we build such a place among us
where all people are equal in love.
God has called us to work together
and to share ev'rything we have.

Refrain

BENEDICTION - Go now in peace to love and serve God!

NOW GO AND PASS CHRIST’S PEACE!

You are invited to spend the next stretch reaching out. Pick up our directory and consider calling someone you don't yet know well or someone who might not know others. It doesn't need to be complicated. Perhaps something as simple as, "Hi! I'm calling to say 'hello'. How have you been?"



If you are on Facebook, please like and follow our page:

<https://www.facebook.com/ttuncAlameda/>

Scripture for Sunday, Oct. 11th - I Chronicles 29:1-20

We begin a new worship series this upcoming week - Gifted & Entrusted!

This week, please hold in God's light:

- All those working to enable God's grace and love to be seen, felt, and experienced in the world.
- The upcoming elections - to transform the divisions, to discern our vote with faith and love.
- All those impacted by COVID - health-wise (physical or mental health) and economically.