



December 12th, 2021
Third Sunday of Advent
Making Room for Joy

Twin Towers United Methodist Church
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**"The Inn" worship series by Worship Design Studio. Adapted, used, livestreamed with permission. "Hope Waits" and "Make of My Heart a Stable" by Amanda Udis-Kessler, used with permission.*

WORSHIP GUIDE

Before you begin your time of worship, find a comfortable place to be and gather whatever you might need: your Bible, 5 Advent candles (You can arrange them into an Advent wreath with greenery, place them on a plate, or just have them in a row. It's all good!), 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!

WELCOME – As John baptized new converts, he invited them to live with “changed hearts and lives.” When asked how to do that, his answers all point to making sure no one is cheated or left without the basic necessities of life, including the right to not be harassed. A full life of joy, which the prophet Isaiah describes as an ever flowing spring, is the birthright of all children of God. May we act to make it so.

OPENING PRAYER - *(adapted from Thom M. Shuman)*

if what the novelists portray, the moviemakers show, the radio hosts talk, the tv preachers yell
is all true,
then why would i want you to return, O God?
but
if you come
so those thirsting for hope
will find it gushing out of the taps,
those cursed by the world
will be embraced in your arms of love,
that the despair which overwhelms so many
will be gathered with the chaff and used to warm the homeless,
those who have lived on the scraps we toss into the trash
will be at the head table of your feast,
and every one, every last one of us will find our way home;
well then, i will wait,
and while waiting,
i will rejoice,
and while rejoicing,
i will make this great news known. Amen.

CENTERING HYMN - “Hope Waits” vs. 3 (Sing once, light candles, sing again)

Listen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qp80wPEc20E>

Joy waits for us at Advent
Joy waits for us to sing.
Joy waits for our amazement
at the grace in everything.
In this time of preparation
for the work of co-creation,
for the birthing of a world
where wonder is restored.
Joy is born in us once more!

Today we offer the Light of Joy to illumine the Door of Welcome.
May this light shine in our hearts, in our lives, and in our church.
May Joy awaken us to possibilities and lead us to greater hospitality.
There *IS* room in this Inn, a House for the Holy.

SCRIPTURE - Isaiah 12: 2-6 (CEB) & Luke 3: 7-18 (CEB)

God is indeed my salvation;

I will trust and won't be afraid.

Yah, the Lord, is my strength and my shield;

he has become my salvation.”

You will draw water with joy from the springs of salvation.

And you will say on that day:

“Thank the Lord; call on God's name;

proclaim God's deeds among the peoples;

declare that God's name is exalted.

Sing to the Lord, who has done glorious things;

proclaim this throughout all the earth.”

Shout and sing for joy, city of Zion,

because the holy one of Israel is great among you.

Then John said to the crowds who came to be baptized by him, “You children of snakes! Who warned you to escape from the angry judgment that is coming soon? Produce fruit that shows you have changed your hearts and lives. And don't even think about saying to yourselves, Abraham is our father. I tell you that God is able to raise up Abraham's children from these stones. The ax is

already at the root of the trees. Therefore, every tree that doesn't produce good fruit will be chopped down and tossed into the fire."

The crowds asked him, "What then should we do?" He answered, "Whoever has two shirts must share with the one who has none, and whoever has food must do the same." Even tax collectors came to be baptized. They said to him, "Teacher, what should we do?" He replied, "Collect no more than you are authorized to collect." Soldiers asked, "What about us? What should we do?" He answered, "Don't cheat or harass anyone, and be satisfied with your pay."

The people were filled with expectation, and everyone wondered whether John might be the Christ. John replied to them all, "I baptize you with water, but the one who is more powerful than me is coming. I'm not worthy to loosen the strap of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. The shovel he uses to sift the wheat from the husks is in his hands. He will clean out his threshing area and bring the wheat into his barn. But he will burn the husks with a fire that can't be put out." With many other words John appealed to them, proclaiming good news to the people.

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

LISTEN - Early in the week, an interesting post came across NextDoor, a neighborhood social media platform. The post began with the writer noting how, on that day, the Webster Street Tube coming into Alameda was completely backed up and taking forever to get through at the end of the day. We know how that can be so, so frustrating, don't we?! All you want to do is go home or get where you're going, but instead, you're stuck...underground no less.

It turned out that there was a stalled and broken down car creating the logjam.

The writer recounted how as he neared the stalled car, he witnessed people furiously honking at the driver, yelling at her out of their windows, even cursing and gesturing aggressively. Clearly, this driver hadn't done this on purpose nor was there anything she could do on her own to improve the situation, yet no one seemed to notice or care.

What do you think happened next?

Having made it through the backed up Tube, the writer could have easily sped up and gone on his merry way. That's what every single other person did, apparently. But concerned for this woman's safety and seeing all the uncalled for abuse being heaped on her, he told of how he pulled off as soon as he could, recruited two pedestrians, and went back into the Tube on foot in order to push this woman's car out and into safety. He ended his post by encouraging everyone to,

please, imagine themselves in the same situation and act with a little more kindness, patience, and compassion towards one another. Maybe even do something to help each other out.

Beautiful, no? Jesus-like, no? Touches your heart, no?

The response to this post was interesting. Comment sections are notorious for their snark and meanness, but response after response after response there was a sense of joy and gratitude. It was as if people caught sight for just a moment of how we're supposed to be, how we want to be, how we long to be with each other: coming to one another's aid, lending a helping hand, depending on the goodness of one another, making a positive difference. There was a sense of joy that the world wasn't all nastiness and meanness, all honking and yelling, all impatience and self-centeredness. There was joy at the kindness extended, at the support offered, at the possibility that strangers can be loving and helpful. There was joy at a difficult and challenging situation getting turned right side up.

It turns out joy is not just found in things like babies and puppies, in cotton candy and sunny days. It turns out joy - a deep and hope-filled joy, the joy we long for and is found in our faith - is found in right and good relationships, relationships that are witness to a generous love and a fierce yet gentle kindness. Joy is found in making room for one another, especially those stranded in tunnels, alone, and without apparent help or support. And it turns out that we can not only rejoice in the signs of joy around us, but we can also be creators of joy in the world ourselves. Let's pray.

This passage from Luke always makes me laugh! John the Baptist is already an oddball character for several different reasons, but then like so many of the prophets of old, he is also a preacher without tact. He says it like he sees it. "You children of snakes! You brood of vipers!" I have to admit, I'm in no way offended by John's name-calling, instead I sense John's intense desire and focus on God's people to be exactly that: God's people! There's an urgency to John's words. Do you feel it? What's the point, after all, to be God's people in name only, to wear it as a label and not much else. John knows that a life of faith, that a life with God is only as good as a life transformed. "Produce fruit that shows you have changed your hearts and lives. Bear fruit worthy of your repentance, of your turning around, of your alignment with God."

The crowd gathered out there in the desert seem to take John's words to heart. They heed his call to accountability. Their response is so good and so right on. "How?!" they wonder. Good ideas remain good ideas until we put them into action. No action, no practice, no discipline, no fruit, Friends, and we remain God's people in name only, candidates for radical pruning. So how? How do we bear good fruit, sweet fruit, worthy fruit? How do we demonstrate that our lives and hearts have indeed been transformed by our wondrous and loving God?

Before I get to John's actual responses, I want to point out 3 really important and interesting noticings here:

1. **The questions are asked in the plural and answered in the plural** – it is not just about you individually living differently (although that is essential and important) but about us, together, living differently. Together, we could make a real difference in the world. So how do *we* live differently together?
2. **Each of John's 3 responses are connected to material goods and economics** – he talks about coats (or rather tunics) and food, about taxes, wages, and money. It's a reminder that what we do with what we have matters. It's also important to remember, John's audience were not likely rich folks. They weren't like you and me. Most everyone in that crowd had just two basic tunics – or undergarments. One was for everyday and the other for the Sabbath. John was saying whatever you have, even if it is next to nothing, share! That's radical generosity.
3. **None of John's responses are "religious"** – the people are not told to pray more, go to church more, or to read their Bibles more. Now I'm not saying those things aren't important...they are. But John puts his emphasis on living out our repentance in *the world, through relationship*. One commentator writes, "For the Baptist, repentance had less to do with how fervently one prays or how faithfully one attends the worship service; instead, it had everything to do with how one handled riches, executed public service, and exercised stewardship".

And so what does John actually say? What's the "how" here that we might attend to? Well, he tells everyone to share. Share your clothes. Share your food. This is something anyone and everyone can do. He then tells the tax collectors and soldiers - those who could and often did act like real bullies in the community - to operate within the bounds of their mandate, to not use their position for their own gain. What do you hear in that for yourself this morning? These are not earth-shattering, mind-numbing directions, Friends. They are, truthfully, kind of basic. And yet, isn't it also true that when we look around - at our own lives and the life of the world - John's directions remain timely and significant?

I'd like to focus in on John's call to share for a moment this morning. We as a community are embarking on a season of serious and intentional prayer and discernment about how we might share the resource we have at 1411 Oak St. Beyond our beloved sanctuary, beyond our offices, we have about half a dozen rooms awaiting a new purpose, a new possibility. We also have a prized gym with a stage and a kitchen. These are valuable and significant resources in our community, Friends. And it wouldn't be hard at all to find tenants and users to fill all the space up, and for us to make quite a bit of money from our resource. But I believe that's not what we're called to. We are not called to fill our space up just to fill it up nor to make as much money from our space as we can. I believe that there are ways we can share these resources with our

community that are not only in alignment with our purpose as a congregation - to be conduits of God's healing - but will bring our purpose into a greater and brighter fullness. I'm thrilled that we are even asking the question as a church! That's amazing. This first conversation in our process begins today at 11:30 a.m. and you are all invited to participate.

But what does all of this have to do with joy? Despite John's name-calling, despite his dismissal, his gruffness, and his toughness, I hear in John's responses to the "how" questions a path to creating joy, the joy of right and good relationships, relationships that chip away at and resist our penchant to honk, to yell, to blame, and to dismiss others, but instead make room for one another, care for one another, and push one another to safety. As we enter this 3rd week of Advent, may we heed John's good news and renew our commitment to be creators of joy! 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 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 www.twintowersumc.org). Take a moment and do that now.

CLOSING HYMN - "What Child is This?", UMH 219

Listen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VCYQFgN8gXw>

Today's closing carol is "What Child is This" that invites "peasants and kings" to claim Christ as their own (the Glory to God hymnal changes this to "one and all"). Chatterton Dix was not a clergy person like most of the hymn writers of the 19th century. He was a businessman in England. He asks the question, "Why lies he in such mean estate," referring to the stable, and in the original second verse, answers by connecting the humble, wooden birth manger to the wood of the cross "borne" at his death:

*Why lies He in such mean estate,
where ox and ass are feeding?
Good Christian, fear: for sinners here
the silent Word is pleading.
Nails, spear, shall pierce him through;
the cross be borne for me, for you
Hail, hail, the Word made flesh,
the babe, the son of Mary.*

True joy acknowledges the suffering of the world, and invites all people regardless of status to claim Christ's grace and joy as salve for the soul. May we offer warm lullabies and soft lullabies to soothe a hurting world.

BENEDICTION -

May God's Door of Welcome swing open in your heart and in your life.

May Christ's humble first dwelling remind you of the plenty you already know.

And may the Spirit lead you into more possibility and hospitality than you can imagine, making room in The Inn for all.

May it be so for you.

May it be so for us.

May it be so for this church. Amen.

NOW GO AND PASS CHRIST'S PEACE!

NEXT WEEK'S SCRIPTURE: Micah 5:2-5a & Luke 1: 46-55

Please make note of these warm invites and gentle reminders:

- **Second Go** - Lucca, Anne, and I, along with our new worship tech team (Donna, Stacy, and Rafael) return 1411 Oak St. to work out the kinks and prepare for the return of in-person worship in January. A LOT has been done to prepare for this moment! And A LOT more is being done. While we hope and pray that all will go smoothly, we know it might not. Please extend your patience, kindness, and encouragement as we keep learning and growing together! Your constructive input is welcomed!

- **Housing the Holy, Discerning Our Use of Space** - This Sunday, the Church Council and Trustees gather after a season of prayer to begin discerning how we might best steward and utilize our wonderful space resources to “house the holy” in alignment with our purpose. All are invited to participate or just listen in. This special meeting begins at 11:30 a.m. on Zoom. Please join [here](#). There' will be other opportunities to join in this conversation in the new year!
- **Calling Welcomers!** Are you ready to gather in person and welcome others to the same? We are forming a new welcoming team for our January launch date and invite you to pitch in! Please send me a note if you're ready and willing.
- **Christmas Eve RSVP's** - We are so excited to hold a special hybrid (in-person and online) Christmas Eve candlelight worship this year! As we do so, we request that all who will attend in-person to please RSVP [here](#).
- **Christmas Eve Choir** - Lucca invites you to sing! She has selected two special pieces for those ready to return. Optional open house rehearsals will be held on Wednesdays, the 15th and 22nd, at 6:00 p.m. Please let her know immediately if you'd like to join in (Lucca.Troutman@gmail.com). All are invited!
 - The Choir will return to regular in-person practices on Wednesdays at 6:00 p.m. beginning Jan. 5th.

Peace, *Emily*