



**February 14, 2021**

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

**510.522.6744    [twintowers.office@gmail.com](mailto:twintowers.office@gmail.com)    [www.twintowersumc.org](http://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, candles, 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! You may also want to watch this video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AuwuPfgCzzw>

**WELCOME** – *\*Thom Shuman/Lectionary Liturgies (inspired by Psalm 30)*

Sing praises to our Lord:

**who heals us and makes us whole.**

Sing praises to our Lord, faithful children of God:

**whose joy rises in our lives each and every day.**

Sing praises to our Lord, faithful children of God;

give thanks to God's holy name:

**God's Kingdom is near to us;**

**God's peace resides in our hearts.**

**CENTERING HYMN** – “What a Friend We Have in Jesus”, UMH 526

Listen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KM2kbogwgBM>

What a friend we have in Jesus

All our sins and griefs to bear

What a privilege to carry

Everything to God in prayer

O, what peace we often forfeit

O, what needless pain we bear

All because we do not carry

Everything to God in prayer

2. Have we trials and temptations?

Is there trouble anywhere?

We should never be discouraged

Take it to the Lord in prayer

Can we find a friend so faithful

Who will all our sorrows share?

Jesus knows our every weakness

Take it to the Lord in prayer

3. Are we weak and heavy laden,

cumbered with a load of care?

Precious Savior, still our refuge;

take it to the Lord in prayer.

Do thy friends despise, forsake thee?

Take it to the Lord in prayer!

In his arms he'll take and shield thee;

thou wilt find a solace there.

**CENTERING PRAYER** – *\*Adapted from Ann Osdieck <http://liturgy.slu.edu/>*

O Healer,  
wounded one,  
we kneel before you.

We know you are ever willing,  
So reach out and lay your hand on us.  
Make whole our broken places.  
Cleanse us.

Send us, scarred and rough,  
to be wounded healers too.

Set your world free.  
Use us to do it.  
We pray in your mighty and loving way and name. **Amen.**

**SCRIPTURE - Mark 1:40-45 / NRSV**

<sup>40</sup> A leper came to [Jesus] begging him, and kneeling he said to him, “If you choose, you can make me clean.” <sup>41</sup> Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, and said to him, “I do choose. Be made clean!” <sup>42</sup> Immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean. <sup>43</sup> After sternly warning him he sent him away at once, <sup>44</sup> saying to him, “See that you say nothing to anyone; but go, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.” <sup>45</sup> But he went out and began to proclaim it freely, and to spread the word, so that Jesus could no longer go into a town openly, but stayed out in the country; and people came to him from every quarter.

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

**LISTEN** - Valentine’s Day earnings hit an all time high last year, setting a new spending record: \$27.4 billion dollars. That was a 32% rise from the year before, not in any way a small jump. Barron’s, a source of financial news, reported that the average expenditure was expected to be \$196 per person! This amount was spread out over significant others, family members, friends, even pets! And what was everybody buying and gifting? Nothing unusual: Candy, cards, an evening out, flowers, and jewelry. Not to be a Valentines grinch, but I’ve often wondered, how did these become our go-to gifts of love for one another? Was it simply marketing? Are these truly the gifts of love we long for, that touch the heart of another...or might there be something better?

In our scripture today, a leper comes to Jesus begging, we are told, on his knees to be healed. “If you choose, you can make me clean.” Mark then tells us that Jesus is “moved with pity”, with compassion in other translations, with anger even as noted in some ancient manuscripts, and so he stretches out his hand and touches the leper. Our breath should be taken away by this. We should be shocked and taken aback, not just by Jesus, but by the leper himself. How dare he?! How dare this man break the rules, bring his disease and disfigurement into polite company, get close to others, risk their cleanliness? And what is Jesus thinking, touching such a man - it’s concerning if not horrifying, risky, and taboo! It brings with it serious consequences for by doing so Jesus makes himself unclean according to Jewish law.

Thinking about this scene reminded me of what happened just 6 months after Pope Francis became Pope Francis. After sharing a simple and pastoral message in St. Peter's Square, Pope Francis made his way, as popes do, through the crowd in the popemobile, greeting those who had come. But there in the crowd was a severely disfigured man who we later learn suffered from a condition called neurofibromatosis. His whole head was enlarged, out of proportion, and his face was covered with tumors. If we’re honest, his condition rendered him grotesque. Instead of waving along his merry way through the square, Pope Francis saw the man and stopped. And the world held its breath as he then got out of the popemobile, came to the man, reached out and touched him, leaned over and kissed him. What Francis did, so simple yet utterly profound, affirmed this man’s value, dignity, and worth. It reminded all of us that he, too, was a child of God. Now that’s a gift of love, isn’t it?

Like the Pope, Jesus doesn’t just behold the leper who comes to him that day with compassion - that would have been a gift of love already. Jesus doesn’t just reach out and touch him. That, too, would’ve been a gift. Jesus beholds the man with compassion, reaches out and touches him, and then says: “I do choose. I am willing. Be made clean!” If we’ve ever harbored a doubt, ever wondered if God is really listening to our pleading, really taking note of what’s paining us, let those words speak to us. “I do choose. Be made clean!” Now that’s a stunning gift of love! To choose to enter into someone else’s suffering, someone else’s pain, someone else’s alienation, and extend healing, bring restoration, make way for wholeness. Is there a better gift of love? Isn’t that so much better than fancy chocolates or expensive jewelry? May we be reminded today, Friends, that the best gifts of love are found in Jesus - in the eyes of compassion, the hands that are always open and outreaching, and in the heart that chooses, over and over and over again, our healing. These gifts are ours always. They are also ours to give away. Let us pray.

We have been exploring this first chapter of Mark for some weeks. It began in Advent, actually, and ends today with yet another story of healing. It would seem that Mark wants us to be clear - crystal clear - what Jesus' mission and purpose is all about: healing, restoration, and wholeness. Having called his first disciples in verse 17, Jesus immediately (to use Mark's favorite word) gets busy: he casts out an unclean spirit, he heals Simon's mother-in-law of fever and then countless others who had gathered, and now this leper. I found it interesting that the morning after Jesus was inundated by "all who were sick or possessed with demons", he told his disciples (vs. 38), "Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do." But Jesus hasn't been proclaiming a message, as far as we can see...or has he? Are we to understand that Jesus' proclamation - that of God's kingdom coming near - is not so much one of words, but embodied in his actions? Are we to recognize the nearness of God's kingdom in and through these very acts of healing and restoration? What might that mean for us who follow him, who are also called to proclaim the kingdom's nearness?

There is so much richness, so much to unpack in this short, 5 verses long story. We begin with the words of the leper, "If you choose, you can make me clean." Other translations read, "If you want to" or "if you are willing". I have sat with these words for weeks, hearing in them this mixture of trust and anxiety. Trust that Jesus is powerful, that he is our healer, that in him is our hope. And anxiety. Anxiety that Jesus wants to, is willing to, will choose to make us - us! - clean, make us whole. Have you ever come before Jesus with that mixture of trust and anxiety, hope and fear? I'm guessing we all have. And Jesus' response - from his eyes, to his touch, to his words, to the healing - are all so moving. They are moving because in them we see and sense love, a love so pure and deep, a love that dares to cast aside our social and religious rules to stand with someone hurting, a love that willingly bears the costs, trades places even, to extend wholeness. Did you notice that? By the end of the story, Jesus has traded places with the leper. Having touched him, Jesus is now the one unclean. Having healed him, Jesus is now the one confined to the outskirts, the country, "outside in deserted places" according to the Common English Bible. Jesus' actions are powerful reminders that he came so that we might have life - full, free, restored lives, lives that proclaim the goodness and the love of our extravagant God.

Friends, I don't know what you are carrying this day. I don't know what healing you are longing for in your life, what might be in the way of you experiencing the wholeness Jesus intended. But I want to encourage you to risk trusting that Jesus' compassion, his touch,

and his willingness to heal are yours too. These are amazing gifts of love that we can celebrate and cherish this Valentines Day.

### **SONG OF MEDITATION - Lay Your Hands Gently Upon Us**

Listen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=746MuTXmgnc>

**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](http://www.twintowersumc.org)). Take a moment and do that now. Please also be sure to return your Stewardship Response Card via mail or online [here](#) today!*

### **CLOSING HYMN - “Healer of Our Every Ill” TFWS 2213**

Listen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xS1CQASrh9Q>

*Refrain:*

Healer of our every ill,  
light of each tomorrow,  
give us peace beyond our fear,  
and hope beyond our sorrow.

You who know our fears and sadness,  
grace us with your peace and gladness;  
Spirit of all comfort, fill our hearts.

2. In the pain and joy beholding  
how your grace is still unfolding,  
give us all your vision, God of love.
3. Give us strength to love each other,  
every sister, every brother;  
Spirit of all kindness, be our guide.
4. You who know each thought and feeling,  
teach us all your way of healing;  
Spirit of compassion, fill each heart.

## **BENEDICTION -**

Go into your week knowing you are  
loved perfectly,  
Made whole daily,  
and empowered as a disciple of Jesus  
to share God's grace - God's always ready willingness to love -  
with everyone you meet. Amen.

## **NOW GO AND PASS CHRIST'S PEACE!**

## **NEXT WEEK'S SCRIPTURE:** Romans 8:31-39

Please note these gentle reminders and warm invitations:

- Have you picked up your **Lent @ Home bag** yet? Stop by the church office at 1411 Oak St for a bag FULL of goodies! The items included will not only support a rich Lenten season, but will be used in worship each week. Stop by any time between 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. through Sunday. (And remember, pick up a bag for a friend!)
- Mark the beginning of Lent together - **Ash Wednesday Worship begins at 7:00 p.m. on Wednesday, Feb. 17th.** (Please contact office for Zoom link)
- **"Roll Down, Justice" Quick Sessions** - each Sunday of Lent, you're invited to re-gather after worship (**11:15 a.m. - CORRECTION**) to dive a bit more deeply into a justice issue, meet a justice-maker, and connect it all to our discipleship. These are "Quick Sessions" that will last no more than 40 minutes. Our first guest will be **Rev. Michael Yoshii** who will help us discern various ways we extend care in our ministries, from mercy to justice. Don't miss it!

I am also forwarding a note from Emilie Scott to our community. I am grateful for Emilie's care, her naming of recent events, and her active response.

Dear TTUMC,

In the past few weeks, we have seen news reporting a spike in hate crimes against the Asian community, both in Oakland, the Bay Area in general, and cities across the country.

Although this is not new, I have not seen much news or media coverage of these attacks and have only been informed through social media and community organizers. The rise in hate speech and

racial slurs have been based in centuries of hatred toward the Asian community. Our elder neighbors have especially been targeted.

The same way I stand with the Black community and Black Lives Matter movement, I stand with the Asian community and all other vulnerable communities that are victim to white supremacy and its extended consequences.

If anyone in our community feels unsafe and isolated, I am here. I'll be more than happy to go on a socially distant walk for fresh air. If you need groceries and don't feel safe getting them yourselves, Kou and I are happy to assist on weekends. Please reach out via email and let me know how I can help.

Thank you,  
Emilie