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**February 21, 2021**

First Sunday of Lent: Roll Down, Justice - Child of God: Naming Each One

***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, your Lent@Home bag, 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!

**WELCOME** – Lent is a time of reminding ourselves who we are called to be in this world.

Our Lenten series this year is inspired by Amos, a prophet whose message is that God calls us to let “justice roll down like waters.”

*Amos says, “I hate, I reject your festivals; I don’t enjoy your joyous assemblies... Take away the noise of your songs. I won’t listen to the melody of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.” (Amos 5)*

Does this mean that we are to give up our worship? That God does not want our worship? No... but worship without justice is not acceptable. Our songs must move us to action on behalf of the marginalized, forgotten, and oppressed. Through powerful music and the remembrance of our rituals of baptism (the origins of Lent), this season will offer us reflection and renewed inspiration to let our lives be tuned to the heart of the Gospel—proclaiming God’s liberating, transformative love for all people.

*Let’s pray:*

Holy and Living God, we open to you this day. **May peace flow. Let justice roll.**

Wake us from our slumber and help us see. **May peace flow. Let justice roll.**

Let no one feel outside *Your* love, outside *our* love. **May peace flow. Let justice roll.**

**OPENING HYMN** - “O the Deep, Deep Love of Jesus” to the tune of UMH 108/Ebenezer /

Listen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cZ-YI6D3rhE>

O the deep, deep love of Jesus!  
Vast, unmeasured, boundless, free,  
rolling as a mighty ocean  
in its fullness over me.  
Underneath me, all around me,  
is the current of thy love;

leading onward, leading homeward,  
to thy glorious rest above.

2. O the deep, deep love of Jesus!  
Spread his praise from shore to shore;  
how he loves us, ever loves us,

changes never, nevermore;  
how he watches o'er his loved ones,  
died to call them all his own;  
how for them he interceding,  
watching o'er them from the throne.

'tis an ocean vast of blessing,  
'tis a haven sweet of rest.  
O the deep, deep love of Jesus!  
'Tis a heav'n of heav'ns to me;  
and it lifts me up to glory,  
for it lifts me up to thee.

3. O the deep, deep love of Jesus!  
Love of every love the best:

### **SCRIPTURE - Romans 8: 31-39 (CEB)**

<sup>31</sup>So what are we going to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? <sup>32</sup>[God] didn't spare [God's] own Son but gave him up for us all. Won't [God] also freely give us all things...?

<sup>33</sup>Who will bring a charge against God's elect people? It is God who acquits them. <sup>34</sup>Who is going to convict them? It is Christ Jesus who died, even more, who was raised, and who also is at God's right side. It is Christ Jesus who also pleads our case for us.

<sup>35</sup>Who will separate us from Christ's love? Will we be separated by trouble, or distress, or harassment, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? <sup>36</sup>As it is written,

We are being put to death all day long for your sake.

We are treated like sheep for slaughter.

<sup>37</sup>But in all these things we win a sweeping victory through the one who loved us. <sup>38</sup>I'm convinced that nothing can separate us from God's love in Christ Jesus our Lord: not death or life, not angels or rulers, not present things or future things, not powers <sup>39</sup>or height or depth, or any other thing that is created.

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

**LISTEN** - Have you ever noticed how church folks - folks like you and I - get a little squeamish, a little antsy, a little pursed-lipped - when talk of justice comes up? And have you ever wondered why? Why does talk of justice make us nervous? It is, after all, a prominent theme woven through our scripture. Why does it prickle our comfort when we happily sing the words of the prophet Micah, "What does the Lord require of you, what does the Lord require of you? Justice, kindness, walk humbly with our God. To seek justice, and love kindness, and walk humbly with our God." It's almost strange, don't you think? We're good with kindness, we're fine with walking humbly with God, but bring up justice and many pastors will tell you: people start shifting around in their seats, eyes start narrowing, arms start crossing, and inevitably we receive an unhappy email or phone call after worship that begins like this, "Pastor, I don't come to church to hear about politics" or "Pastor, politics do not belong in worship."

But that has never made any sense to me and I haven't yet figured out how justice (or politics, for that matter) became a dirty word in the church, how it became separated from our understanding of God's love, set apart from our practices of God's kindness, and made incompatible rather than integral to our walking humbly with God. For isn't justice simply, as the theologian Cornel West asserts, what love looks like in public?

And what does love look like in public? Now I'm not talking about just any love, but God's love, the love that Paul so beautifully and profoundly writes about in the scripture from Romans: that fierce and steadfast love that sticks with us through thick and thin, that love that is all-giving and all-including, that love that is unbreakable, undiminishable, unrelenting even in the face of the worst life might offer us, even in the face of death itself. What does *that* love look like in public? How would *that* love change our collective relationships? What would *that* love require of us in the face of suffering and of injustice?

Over the next five weeks, it is my prayer that we will catch sight of a compelling and convicting vision of God's great love - of justice - unleashed in public. It is my prayer that this vision will fill us, not with disturbance, but with bold hope, hope for the sure emergence of God's kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven; that this vision will invite tender possibilities of true repentance that lead us to ask, like those gathered along the Jordan River to hear John the Baptist, "What then should we do?"; and that this vision will fuel our concrete work to let justice roll down, and healing flood this land. Let us pray.

Ever since God set God's people free from the bondage of slavery in Egypt, a refrain had been circulating in the community: "Remember that you too were slaves in Egypt." It is something that God's people were never to forget, a point of reference through which to see and understand themselves, to see and understand the world, and most importantly, to see and experience God, their great liberator. "Remember that you too were slaves in Egypt" was a call to gratitude for all that God had done and all that God continued to do. It was an anchor in humility, reminding the people of their roots, their ancestral suffering. It was a powerful bond for the community, a reminder of a shared experience that shaped and formed them. And it called forth compassion, especially for those in their midst who were right now suffering hardship: orphans, widows, strangers."Remember that you too were slaves in Egypt" was code for all of this and more. It was code to be tender hearted and just...like God.

By the time Amos came on to the scene, that core refrain of God's people had faded into the background. Slavery was so far removed from their experience that they had forgotten how the tune went. Under King Jeroboam II, their territory had been expanded and the kingdom was experiencing unprecedented wealth. God's people replaced their ancient refrain of remembrance with songs of prosperity and of ease. They were more concerned with gaining than with giving, with enjoying the good things of life than ensuring the good of the whole community, with taking care of themselves than caring for those in need. They had not only forgotten the refrain but everything the refrain was about. Things had gotten so bad, in fact, that at the heart of Amos' accusation of God's people was the terrible fact that they had become slave-dealers themselves, selling the poor amongst them into debt slavery all the while denying them any legal

representation. Worse yet, they did this while still observing religious rituals and making the requisite offerings to God. It is into this dissonant reality that God, through Amos, declares, “I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them...Take away from me the noise of your songs...But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.”

What was that to look like? What was God calling forth? What would it look like for justice and righteousness to flow through our communities? Well, we know what happens when water - fresh, clean water - flows through a community. There is life. As the water protectors in North Dakota have reminded us as they have resisted a polluting pipeline through their sacred lands and crossing rivers, water is life and it is life, not for one, but for the whole community. Whole communities, creation itself, benefit and thrive. Wouldn't that be true with justice and righteousness also? That in its flow we would know life, growth, thriving as a collective? For justice and righteousness are at root about right relationships, relationships grounded in fairness, in equity, relationships rooted in the recognition that every person is a child of God, created in God's very own image, bearing God's spirit and loved fiercely by God. Every person. Justice rolling down is the movement ensuring that this is so.

Friends, there are movements for justice happening all around us. Keeping In mind the context of Amos, the wealth gap that existed, the blind eye turned towards the needy, let me just point to one movement for justice that we could get involved in: The campaign to raise the federal minimum wage to \$15, to what is known as a “living wage”. (Did you know that it is just \$7.25 right now, untouched since 2009?) The truth is that low wages hurt all workers but are particularly harmful to Black workers and other workers of color, especially women of color, who make up a disproportionate share of workers who are severely underpaid. According to studies, raising the minimum wage to \$15 would:

- lift pay for nearly 32 million workers—21% of the U.S. workforce.
- enable affected workers who work year round to earn an extra \$3,300 a year—enough to make a tremendous difference in the life of a cashier, home health aide, or fast-food worker who today struggles to get by on less than \$25,000 a year.
- impact a majority (59%) of workers whose total family income is below the poverty line.

*<https://www.epi.org/publication/why-america-needs-a-15-minimum-wage/>*

Is this not something the church, something that we should get involved in? Would our voices added not make a difference? Imagine if we, if the church, got wholeheartedly behind this movement.

The Rev. William Barber, II, President of Repairers of the Breach (a phrase taken from Amos 9) said recently, “Fifty-seven years ago, Martin Luther King Jr. called for a \$2 an hour minimum wage, which would be over \$15 today. A few weeks ago, all the politicians were saying, let's follow Dr. King. Let's hear Dr. King's message of love. Well you can't hear the message of love

without hearing the love and the justice connected together. To go backwards on this would be morally indefensible, constitutionally inconsistent and economically insane.”

So where do we begin? We begin by remembering our faith ancestors were slaves in Egypt and take to heart all that means. We begin by bowing in wonder and humility to each other, recognizing God’s image “ineffably etched”, as Martin Luther King, Jr. writes, even in our enemies. We begin by insisting each life matters - Black lives matter, Asian lives matter, homeless lives matter, incarcerated lives matter, queer lives matter. Each life matters and we will fearlessly examine ourselves for impulses that would imply otherwise. We begin by declaring that nothing can separate anyone from the love of God and we refuse to participate in any action, any system, any belief that would attempt to do so, that would diminish God’s love for another. We begin by not just walking humbly with our God, not just by loving kindness, but by seeking justice also.

This Lent, we commit to letting justice roll down. Amen.

### **SONG OF MEDITATION - “Child of God” / Mark Miller**

Watch here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vDmrS3ts0B0>

*In our baptismal rituals, we take a special moment to repeat the precious name of the person being baptized. In a world that seems obsessed with who is “right and wrong,” “good or bad,” “in or out” or on “this side or that side,” it is a radical endeavor to name each person as “Child of God”—as this song does—no matter what people say. How will we be agents of God’s justice demanding that barriers to the worth and dignity of all people be brought down so that all might know God’s love?*

During Lent we will be contributing to the waters of justice each week by writing words on strips of cloth that will be added to our ever-flowing stream. As we listen to our song of meditation today, I invite you to write your name onto a strip of cloth as a sign that you, beloved Child of God, are part of the waters of love and justice.

**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** - “Fill Us with Your Love, O Lord” W&S 3005

Listen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j5QyqkABB-0>

*Refrain:*

Fill us with your love, O Lord,  
And we will sing for joy. (x2)

Teach us to number our days aright  
That we may have wisdom of heart.  
Return, O Lord! How long?  
Have pity on your servants.

3. Let your work be seen by your servants  
and your glory by their children.  
May the gracious care  
of the Lord our God be ours.  
Prosper the work of our hands.

**BENEDICTION** -

As counterintuitive as it may seem, may the work of loving ourselves  
be our first step toward loving others.

Remember, you have been named “Child of God.”

Let the act of seeing yourself through the eyes of the Divine transform you and move you to  
compassion for yourself and others.

**May the song we sing in our heart be pleasing to God,  
moving us to the passion and compassion of Jesus, uplifted by a Spirit  
that keeps us humming life’s tune of love. Amen.**

**NOW GO AND PASS CHRIST’S PEACE!**

**NEXT WEEK’S SCRIPTURE:** *Psalm 13*

Please note these gentle reminders and warm invitations:

I am thrilled that every last one of our **Lent @ Home** bags has been picked up!

If you did not get one and would like one, please send me a note and I will happily put one together for you. Each bag is filled with gifts for this holy season: a devotional written for just this moment, the prompts for your Lenten commitments, different things to be used during worship, and more.

Throughout this special Lenten season, we invite the words of Amos to resonate in our hearts and our spirits: "*Let justice roll down like water, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.*"

This is what God called forth from God's people: not our "solemn assemblies", not our offerings of "fatted animals", not even our songs, but right relationships, relationships rooted in justice and righteousness. How might we honor this call through the season of Lent as we seek to return to God's heart?

Please do note that during the season of Lent, worship will be followed by "**Quick Sessions**" that invite us to engage in issues of justice and meet those actively making way for justice. This first week, we welcomed **Rev. Michael Yoshii** to share a framework for how we might understand our ministries of care and discern new ministry paths that include justice-making. **Quick Sessions will convene at 11:15 a.m. and end promptly by noon.** You are encouraged to make a fresh cup of tea after worship, grab a bite, and join in. **Next week: Lynette Lee**, member of Buena Vista UMC and former Executive Director of East Bay Asian Local Development Corporation helping us think about housing.

Other Lenten Invites:

- **Tuesday Check-In's @ 4:00 - 4:30 p.m.** - We are opening up space to share about our Lenten commitments each week, encourage each other, and pray together. [Please email for Zoom link]
- **Honoring Black History Month, Wed. Feb. 24th @ 7:00 p.m.** - We will gather to watch DS Staci's powerful Black History Month sermon and share in a time of reflection. [Please email for Zoom link]
- **Dine & Connect, Mar. 1st** - Would you like to pitch in, chop veggies, box up meals for our guests, meet folks in the community? There's room for you!