



**May 16, 2021**

Ascension Sunday

***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, 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** – Adapted from Rev. Mindi <http://rev-o-lution.org/>

Easter reminded us that a new day is always beginning.

**Hope abides!**

A fresh start is granted.

**Faith abides!**

In each moment, we have the opportunity to do something new.

**Hope abides!**

Christ is entering our life in a new way.

**Faith abides!**

Come, let us worship God,  
who is inviting us into life in a new way,  
a way that transcends death, a way of hope and faith.

**Love abides!**

**We will worship Christ, who overcame death to give us new life today and everyday!**

**Alleluia!**

**OPENING PRAYER** - <http://revgalblogpals.org/>

Where did you go, Jesus?

Where did you go?

We stand, necks craning back, looking  
heavenwards

But we cannot see you

Where did you go?

Did you leave us?

Hush my child,

Listen, listen,

Listen for the breeze

Listen for the breath

Listen for the Holy Wind's whispered  
promise

You are not alone

You are not alone

You are never alone

My love is yours

My strength is yours

My wisdom... all yours for the taking  
Listen, listen, listen....

It comes, a gentle breeze,  
caressing your spirit  
It comes, building, energising,  
filling the spaces  
Until you are full

O Holy Spirit! Come!

Breath of God  
Spirit of God  
Our wise counsellor  
Our constant companion  
Helps us to remember that you are always  
with us  
In persecutions, and turmoil, and dread  
In excitements, and joy and love

In the mundane and everyday  
You are. Here.

O God  
Our God  
We praise you  
We call on you  
We rely on you  
As we stand and stare  
As we wait again  
for the reminder that Pentecost only  
needed to happen once  
as you promised  
for now the Spirit is always with us  
  
Creator, Brother, Breath,  
Amen and amen

### **OPENING HYMN - "He Came Singing Love" by Colin Gibson**

*Listen here:* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U8Y6g5InyCY>

1. He came singing love  
and he lived singing love;  
he died singing love,  
he arose in silence;  
for the love to go on  
we must make it our song;  
you and I be the singers.
2. He came singing faith...
3. He came singing hope...
4. He came singing peace...

### **SCRIPTURE - Acts 1:1-11**

In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning <sup>2</sup> until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. <sup>3</sup> After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. <sup>4</sup> While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise

of the Father. “This,” he said, “is what you have heard from me; <sup>5</sup> for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

<sup>6</sup> So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?” <sup>7</sup> He replied, “It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. <sup>8</sup> But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” <sup>9</sup> When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. <sup>10</sup> While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. <sup>11</sup> They said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

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

**LISTEN** - Do the people around you - your family, your friends, your co-workers, your neighbors - know that you are a lover of God and a follower of Jesus?

I apologize for being so direct and perhaps even making you a little uncomfortable this morning but I wonder if we might hold that question for ourselves for a little while.

Do the people around us know how important our faith, our relationship to God is? Do they know the stories of how God has shown up in our lives, sometimes at the strangest moments and often at the most critical moments, the stories of how the things we do and say and don't do and don't say are rooted in our desire to be faithful to God, obedient to Jesus, the stories of how God has made a difference...just this week? Do the people around us know the stories of how our lives have changed, how we have taken different roads and paths, how we turned, how we made it through...because of God?

Some years ago when I was pastoring in Chinatown I remember a lifelong member who was in his late 70's saying to me, a little embarrassedly and a little baffled: I don't think any of my friends know I'm a Christian. Before we tsk tsk at him we might ask ourselves, do our friends?

Our passage from the beginning of Acts is assigned to Ascension Sunday, the Sunday before we celebrate Pentecost, in all 3 years of the lectionary cycle. It is, I imagine, rather familiar to you. It marks a decisive moment in Jesus' time on earth. He has taught, healed, and ministered among the people. He has been arrested, tortured, and executed. He has resurrected and returned to the disciples side. And now, 40 days after Jesus' miraculous resurrection, he is about to be, according to Luke, the writer of Acts, “taken up to heaven”, “lifted up”, obscured by the clouds as he ascends. It is a grand moment that the church celebrates with big music: All Hail the Power of

Jesus' Name, Christ Whose Glory Fills the Sky, Crown Him with Many Crowns, and the slightly more contemporary, Lord I Lift Your Name on High. Each of these songs seek to celebrate and honor what we affirm in our creed: Jesus taking up his rightful place at the side of God. And while all of that is important, I want to invite you to lower your eyes from the heavens for a moment and look to the words Jesus said right before this momentous disappearance: "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Jesus is here redirecting the disciples' curiosity, focus, and attention away from a divine timetable for God's kingdom come, the when and how long of their question, to a clear directive and task: becoming Spirit-empowered witnesses.

And so I ask again, do the people around you - your family, your friends, your co-workers, your neighbors...heck, even strangers - do they know that you are a lover of God and a follower of Jesus?

Bob Farr, one of the co-authors of the book, "Get Their Name: Grow Your Church by Building New Relationships" accuses us in the United Methodist Church of seeing, experiencing, and handling evangelism - the act of sharing God's good news for our full and abundant life - as a four letter word. In other words, we recoil and shy away from it. And believe me, having grown up in a country that was missionized by the West, I know how ugly and awkward our track record of evangelism can be. We have no desire to hand out pamphlets proclaiming "Jesus saves" anymore than we want to walk through some strange and contrived conversation with someone that begins with, "Would you like to accept Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior?" But what if evangelism had everything to do with being Spirit-empowered witnesses of Jesus? What if sharing our faith - in meaningful, transformative, loving ways - was at the core of our discipleship?

But what does it mean to share our faith? What does it mean to be Spirit-empowered witnesses? (Great questions!)

When the average United Methodist (and I imagine, mainline Christian) is asked to share their faith journey or faith story, Farr goes on to document, most rehearse the story of their church involvement. They tell their "church journey", their "church membership journey": I started attending so and so at this time, I've served on this, that, and the other committee, my family does this, etc. They fail to illuminate how God is real for them, how God matters in their lives, how God has made and is making a difference. And in so doing, they fail to share the transformative power, the transformative reality of what it means to be loved by God, empowered by the Holy Spirit. "Nobody cares about your church membership," Farr states starkly, "they want to know if God is real and if God cares."

And so how do we communicate that, Friends? How do we become Spirit-empowered witnesses of Jesus?

Farr and his co-authors suggest that we practice and practice and practice and get really good at answering this question: “How have I experienced God recently in my life?” You see, Friends, when the Holy Spirit does indeed fall afresh on all those disciples that watched Jesus rise up into the clouds on that Jerusalem hillside, what’s unlocked in them is their unstoppable witness, their passionate story-telling of who their friend, their rabbi, their Jesus was to them. What begins to happen is that they begin to share what they saw Jesus do, what he taught, and how Jesus touched them, challenged them, changed them. We know from the rest of Acts that this sharing ignited a movement that has carried on till today, to us.

It is these stories, our everyday stories of how God helps us get out of bed when we can’t or don’t want to, how God is there in the sweetness of a kind word, a tender moment, how we feel peace flood our bodies when anxiety threatens to bind us up, how God gives us the words, the knowing, the hope, the wonder for any given moment, how Jesus takes our hand as we lay on operating tables or huddled over kitchen tables, how the hair on our arms stand up as we mutter our prayers. It is these stories, everyday stories of experiencing God, everyday stories that we all have, that transform the world.

And so now, it’s our turn. It’s our turn to pray for, to invite, and to welcome the Holy Spirit to empower us. “How have you experienced God recently in your life?” I invite you to ponder this question as we listen to this song and then to gather - with no pressure, but a deep welcome - to practice with each other. It might not be easy this first time. In fact, it might feel downright awkward. We might not even trust that we have any story at all to tell. But as Steven and I learned from Milo and Imani’s favorite preschool teacher, “Practice makes it better!”

Come, Holy Spirit! Empower us to share your love and hope, to be witnesses of Jesus in Alameda, Oakland, San Francisco....to the ends of the earth! Amen.

**SONG OF MEDITATION** - “Love is a Miracle” / Maverick City

Watch and listen: <https://youtu.be/MRkZj0UoK4A>

**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.*

*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 via PayPal (visit [www.twintowersumc.org](http://www.twintowersumc.org)). Take a moment and do that now.*

**CLOSING HYMN** - "Go Forth for God", UMH 670

Listen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cub-6HopfOc>

1. Go forth for God,  
go to the world in peace;  
be of good courage,  
armed with heavenly grace,  
in God's good Spirit daily to increase,  
till in the kingdom we see face to face.  
Go forth for God,  
go to the world in peace .
2. Go forth for God, go to the world in love;  
strengthen the faint,  
give courage to the weak;  
help the afflicted;  
richly from above God's love supplies  
the grace and power we seek.  
Go forth for God, go to the world in love
3. Go forth for God,  
go to the world in strength;  
hold fast to good, be urgent for the right;  
render to no one evil;  
Christ at length shall overcome  
all darkness with his light.  
Go forth for God,  
go to the world in strength.
4. Go forth for God, go to the world in joy,  
to serve God's people  
every day and hour,  
and serving Christ, our every gift employ,  
rejoicing in the Holy Spirit's power.  
Go forth for God, go to the world in joy.

**BENEDICTION** -

Friends, we are called to go from this place to share our faith in word and in deed,  
in speech and in action.

As we go out to be a living witness, as we go out to testify to God's love active in the world, go knowing that God goes with you, sharing the laughter and the hope, the fears and the tears. Listen! You are not alone! Thanks be to God! Amen.

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

A few gentle updates and warm invitations:

- **Friends! I'm coming home!** I am beyond excited. Dad received word of Dad's visa on Tuesday and had his passport back in our hands on Wednesday. That evening, we purchased tickets to return this Monday, May 17th. I have experienced grace upon grace throughout this very tough journey and my heart is grateful to God and to each of you for your prayer and support. I look forward to being with you - in (virtual) person - on Pentecost, May 23rd! As always, I invite you to send me a note or a text to share how you've been and how you've experienced God recently in your life.
- **Pentecost Celebration - Next Sunday, May 23rd**, is Pentecost, the day we celebrate and marvel at the coming of the Holy Spirit in fresh, bold, and powerful ways. You are encouraged to wear red to worship AND to create a fiery, Spirit-filled background (live or virtual). We will be holding our 2nd annual Pentecost Background Contest including prizes and everything! Join the fun and celebration!
- **New Worship Series Coming! Get Ready!** As a congregation committed to being conduits of God's healing in our neighborhood and beyond, we are going to dive deeply and intentionally into the healing stories of the Gospels in the coming season. We seek powerful healing for ourselves and a strengthening of our ability to be conduits of God's healing to others in meaningful and practical ways. I hope you are as excited and inspired as I am to start this series. Please consider who in your family and community might be longing for a word of healing...and invite them to worship with you!
  - You are strongly encouraged to purchase your own copy of **Miracle: When Jesus Touches Our Deepest Need** (Flora Slosson Wuellner) from your favorite local or online bookstore.
  - **Go Deep: Set aside Thursdays, beginning June 3rd, at 7:00 p.m.** for a time of rich reflection and powerful prayer as we dig further into the Miracles series. We will do so via Zoom.

I look forward to being with you soon!

Peace and Hugs,  
*Emily*