



Eastertide VI

May 22nd, 2022

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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, 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!

OPENING PRAYER - [<https://christinejerrett.wordpress.com/>]

God of new possibilities,
we give thanks for your constant reminder
that you have a vision for our world
that far exceeds our present realities.

You call us up out of our cynicism, apathy and fear
to keep our eyes on the life you would have us live.

We are grateful for the courage and determination
you make available to us to sustain our efforts
to work for better relationships, justice and peace.
Help us to find the language and the courage
to share our own faith stories with each other,
and to be open and honest and humble in all of our interactions.

Fill this time of worship, O God, that we might be drawn further into your presence and your vision. Amen.

CENTERING HYMNS - “Jesu, Tawa Pano / Jesus, We Are Here”, TFWS 2273

Listen here: <https://youtu.be/ze5IjK2jzUI>

SCRIPTURE - Acts 16:9-15, NRSV

⁹ During the night Paul had a vision: there stood a man of Macedonia pleading with him and saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” ¹⁰ When he had seen the vision, we immediately tried to cross over to Macedonia, being convinced that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them.

¹¹ We set sail from Troas and took a straight course to Samothrace, the following day to Neapolis,
¹² and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city for some days. ¹³ On the sabbath day we went outside the gate by the river, where we supposed there was a place of prayer; and we sat down and spoke to the women who had gathered there. ¹⁴ A certain woman named Lydia, a worshiper of God, was listening to us; she was from the city of Thyatira and a dealer in purple cloth. The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul. ¹⁵ When she and her household were baptized, she urged us, saying, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home.” And she prevailed upon us.

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

LISTEN - *You can listen to the sermon [here](#).*

When was the last time you encountered someone (or someones) that needed help? My guess is that whether the plea comes to us directly - pulling up next to someone at an intersection holding a sign that says, “Please help!” or a family member that calls us with a request - or more indirectly - watching the news and feeling the weight of the need and the brokenness of our world - we are inundated by opportunities to help, to offer support, to pitch in, to (hopefully) make a difference.

In fact, my guess is that our lives are so filled with these opportunities and invitations that we stop paying close attention to them, stop allowing our hearts and minds to be moved by them, stop responding, in fact. I think of the dozens and dozens of emails that come through my inbox each day from people and organizations that I don’t even know, asking for this or that support, making the case for \$2 or \$20. I think of how many pieces of mail I take directly from our mailbox to the recycle bin because there’s no way I have the capacity (or interest?) to attend to each fundraising appeal by all the many organizations doing good work. And that’s just from strangers, nevermind from sources closer to home and within the community. It feels impossible to attend to every one of these requests to help, doesn’t it? I wonder if you’ve ever felt overwhelmed or bewildered by the need. But surely that doesn’t mean we close our eyes or our hearts and do nothing then either.

As followers of Jesus, as those called to “keep his word”, to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, to release the captives, what do we do? What do we do when faced with all sorts of requests and pleas to, “Come over..and help us”? What do we do as individuals and as a connected community? Are we to, like Paul in today’s scripture, “immediately” jump into action? Do we, like Peter in an earlier reading, “kneel and pray”? Surely there must be a “sweet spot”, some clarity between doing nothing (apathy) and doing everything (saviorism). How might we engage, respond, and act in the world, faithful to our calls as disciples, rooted in resurrection audacity

(rather than fear or overwhelm), and drawing on Holy Spirit power (and not just our own)? As we enter into today's scripture, I want to invite you to bring before God a specific call for help that you are perhaps holding and discerning right now, and if that doesn't resonate, then to open yourself to be in a listening mode, asking the question, "How can I help?". Let's pray.

We've been reading from Acts during Eastertide this year. For the previous three weeks, we've walked alongside Peter as he cast fear aside, as he called forth life in the face of death, and as he widened the circle, breaking down an enormous and long-standing wall between the Jews and Gentiles. But the full title of Acts is Acts of the Apostles and so this week, we move from accompanying the apostle Peter, to walking alongside the apostle Paul.

Like Peter, encountering the resurrected Jesus entirely changed Paul's life. He went from a persecutor and tormenter of the new church, to one of its most fervent champions. When we catch up with Paul in chapter 16, verse 9, Paul has been all over the place. If there is anyone focused on reaching out with the good news of God's grace and love, it is Paul! After all, he was commissioned in chapter 13 at the direction of the Holy Spirit: "While they - the church at Antioch - were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off." (Acts 13:2-3) And, truly, off they went.

Yet their going hasn't been without challenges. If we backed up just 3 verses and started reading at verse 6, here's what we'd hear: "[Peter and Timothy] went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. When they had come opposite Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them; so, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas."

I find these 3 verses fascinating as they remind me of a Quaker saying I recently learned, "Proceed as the way opens." It was shared with me as wisdom for discerning action. Reflecting on this statement, Philip Gulley, a Quaker pastor, writes, "So often we try to force our way through life, determined to do this thing or that thing, believe it to be the right path....In our passion to reach our goal, we sometimes act rashly, giving little thought to the consequences. We don't wait for the way to open, we seek no guidance, we fail to listen to that of God within us, we don't consult our conscience, we don't listen to others, or to our best instincts. Then, because the way doesn't open up soon enough to suit us, we bulldoze our way through, acting hastily, before all the pieces are in place...." That's true, isn't it? Ours is a culture that urges us to make a way, force a way, to overcome any obstacles that get in our way. We prize that energy. We think of it as perseverance. And there is a time and place for that, I'm certain. But what if a way closing is the work of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus, just as it was for Paul and Timothy? How might

“proceeding as the way opens” help us listen, pay attention, and discern more attentively? How might it invite us into holy waiting?

But back to Troas, where Paul is. It is there, on the edge of Asia, that Paul has a simple vision: a man, a Macedonian man, a man from across the sea, pleading for help: “come over to Macedonia and help us.” What happens next is interesting: it would seem the group leapt into action. After all, Luke tells us: “we immediately tried to cross over to Macedonia.” But that timing wouldn’t be quite right. Brian Peterson, Lutheran New Testament scholar writes, “One might think that getting a vision from God would make everything clear, but even a vision requires interpretation; more to the point, it requires the community of faith. Paul received the vision, but verse 10 says that “we” concluded what it meant and what to do about it. The vision must be interpreted, and that task does not fall to Paul alone. The small community contained in “we” is involved in discerning that this is God’s call not just to an individual, but to “us”; that the “help” which is needed is the preaching of the gospel; that the call was for immediate action.”

This is an important point, Friends, one that I hadn’t considered before. We have such a strong tendency to individualize our faith (and there is a place for individual discernment), to act as lone rangers, that we forget at every turn ours is a faith practiced, enacted, perfected, and carried forward in community. God might have given Paul the vision, but it wasn’t for Paul to fulfill the vision by himself. Mission - not Paul’s, not the church’s, but God’s mission - is carried out in community. And so Paul had to bring the vision to the community, and together, the community had to “conclude” (NIV, CEB) and “be convinced” (NRSV), or “know for sure” (The Message) in order to act, to act together, to act “immediately”.

We began today considering how is it that we engage, respond to all the pleas for help that come our way. How might we be empowered to respond? A few thoughts come:

- Let’s listen - yes, to the world, yes, to each other, but yes, to God! I wonder if we get overwhelmed, on the one hand, and frozen, on the other because we fail to listen...to God. If Paul wasn’t listening to God, he’d never notice the way closing, nor the vision that came.
- Let’s do the work of listening together - I have learned again and again and again the very difficult and frustrating lesson that God’s work is done in community. Working a vision through so that we are together convinced, together conclude, together know is hard work, slow work, even painful work. But often, it is the work.
- Let’s attend to the way opening and the way closing - sometimes we can act with immediacy, and sometimes we’ll have to sit and wait.
- “Helping” is less about projects and more about forming relationships – “come and help us” sounds like sometimes we can go and do...but what Paul and friends end up doing is spending time with women by the river: “and we sat down and spoke to the women who

had gathered there.” And in connecting with them, in talking with them, something transformative happens. Are we willing to spend our time and presence, versus just our money and resources?

Over the last several months, we have been going through an intentional visioning process. We’ve been listening for God’s vision, God’s call as to how to use these amazing buildings. It’s been a slow process. There’s talking and there’s silence. There’s prayer and there’s waiting. We have, without knowing it, been proceeding as way opens. But I’ve witnessed how some things have begun to emerge - new possibilities, new relationships that hold the hope of growing and amplifying God’s healing in, through, and beyond us...just by sharing - generously sharing - space. I am so grateful to those who participated in the process and I can’t wait to share more about all of that with you on Pentecost Sunday, June 5th.

Friends, the needs are so great out there. Pleas of help come to us from all directions, every day and all day. Yet we can be assured that when we listen, when we listen with attentiveness, openness, and anticipation, God will direct us, will give us vision. The way will open. And when it does, may we jump up and get busy - immediately, in fact - convinced together of God’s call. 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 - “Move Me”, UMH 471

Move me, move me, move me to do thy will.

Move us, move us, move us to do thy will.

BENEDICTION -

May the audacious love of God go before you,
the bold grace of Jesus go beside you,
and the transforming power of the Holy Spirit blow all around you,
today and always.

Go in power, audacity, and joy to serve our mighty God!

NOW GO AND PASS CHRIST'S PEACE!

Please make notes of this news and invitations:

- **Great thanks to all who gave so generously to David's Acknowledgement Fund.** We will be giving him his gift next Sunday, on May 29th, immediately following worship. Please join in.
- **Healing Worship Service** - We will hold a healing focused worship service next Sunday, May 29th. Our time will combine a time of scripture reading, meditating, prayer, and song and is best experienced in-person. Please join us in the sanctuary!
- **Community Work Day** - We are calling together a work team with Embrace and All Good Living to paint our upstairs Education Building. May 28th, 9:00 - 2:00 p.m. (Lunch included.) Please send me a note if you are able to pitch in.
- **Dine & Connect, June & July Edition** - Please sign up to pitch in to this vital ministry!