



“Ascension of Christ”, Ed De Guzman

May 24th, 2020

Seventh Sunday of Easter / Ascension Sunday

Twin Towers United Methodist Church

1411 Oak Street, Alameda, CA 94501

*Adapted from “Heart of the Matter” Worship Resource, © Marcia McFee

WORSHIP GUIDE

Before you begin your time of worship, find a comfortable place to be and gather whatever you might need: your Bible, some paper or a notebook, something to write 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 - “My Heart, Your Home”

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

WELCOME – Today marks the 7th and final Sunday of the Easter season. We have gathered each of these 7 weeks with the conviction that Easter isn’t just a day, but a practice for every day. Since Jesus’ resurrection, he has reminded his disciples time and again that the new season in front of them isn’t about his impending absence, but about the beginning of how they will carry his heart within theirs, and how they will take his love, power, and healing into the world. YOU will be my witnesses, Jesus says. That reminder remains as vital and important for us to hear and grapple with today! But lest we think we’re doing it along, Jesus also reminds us:“...[Y]ou 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.” Power to be witnesses!

OPENING PRAYER – *You are invited to take a deep breath as you pray:*

Holy Living God,
Heartbeat of Creation,
help me to take this time to center on you,
for you made me,
you gave me life,
and you continue to be with me
every moment...
every breath...
every step. Amen.

Hear this assurance from God:

Be still, O heart, you're not alone, your beat is shared with me.

Come now, and calm, and center here, you're mine, secure and free.

You are invited to take another deep breath, making sure your shoulders and any tension you feel in your body is blown out, let go of with each breath. Take another.

If you have been using a heart stone (worry stone, or courage stone), pick it up now and let your touch on its surface remind you that God's touch is within you and around you.

As close and real as the stone is in your hand right now, that's how close Love is to you always.

Take a moment to imagine letting go of your worries for now into God's heart of love. Pray:

Into your care, O God, I offer now,
my worries, fears and strife.

I turn to you and know you're near—

Your light, my love and life.

CENTERING HYMN - "Open the Eyes of My Heart, Lord", W&S 3008

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

Open the eyes of my heart, Lord,

open the eyes of my heart;

I want to see you,

I want to see you.

To see you high and lifted up,

shining in the light of your glory.

Pour out your power and love as we sing.

Holy, holy, holy,

Holy, holy, holy,

I want to see you.

SCRIPTURE - **Acts 1: 6-11** (The Message)

Today we commemorate the moment when the disciples witnessed Jesus leaving this

physical world. What might you hope to hear from Jesus, I wonder, on this final occasion?

What might you want him to say to you?

⁶When [Jesus and his disciples] were together for the last time they asked, “Master, are you going to restore the kingdom to Israel now? Is this the time?” ⁷⁻⁸He told them, “You don’t get to know the time. Timing is the Father’s business. What you’ll get is the Holy Spirit. And when the Holy Spirit comes on you, you will be able to be my witnesses in Jerusalem, all over Judea and Samaria, even to the ends of the world.” ⁹⁻¹¹These were his last words. As they watched, he was taken up and disappeared in a cloud. They stood there, staring into the empty sky. Suddenly two men appeared—in white robes! They said, “You Galileans!—why do you just stand here looking up at an empty sky? This very Jesus who was taken up from among you to heaven will come as certainly—and mysteriously—as he left.”

REFLECT -

- How do you usually experience waiting? What has the waiting of Sheltering in Place been like for you?
- Jesus instructed his disciples to “wait [in Jerusalem] for the promise of the Father”. How do you suppose we might best “wait” for the Holy Spirit?

I don’t think there exists a person in the universe who likes to or appreciates waiting. This was the case before the pandemic and, I imagine, the pandemic has only served to exacerbate and deepen our dislike. We have ALL been waiting for at least 66 days...that’s how long we’ve been under our state’s Shelter in Place Order. That’s a significant amount of time. And the fact of the matter is that we will continue to wait for the foreseeable future. In other words, there is no end in sight to this waiting we’re in – at least not that I’ve heard of.

And what are we waiting for? On the one hand, we are waiting to see what this virus – the 2019 novel coronavirus – does, how it spreads, how it impacts people’s health, who it impacts, and how our health system can or cannot adequately respond to the impact. Given its “novel” status, there are a lot of unknowns and things seem to keep changing. We are also waiting for various systems to ramp up their capacity – our testing and detection systems, our contact tracing systems, our health care system, and all that goes with each of those. But we are also waiting for our own smaller systems to ramp up. For church, we have to learn how to sanitize and clean anew, how to organize children’s programs safely, even how to facilitate in-person worship in ways that will minimize transmission (Did you know that singing is considered highly dangerous in this new world?!). And we are also

waiting for a vaccine to be developed – one that can assure a reasonable amount of safety and protection in the face of this deadly virus. And so we keep waiting.

In our scripture today from Acts, we hear Jesus sending his disciples into a season of waiting. Luke, the writer of Acts, tells us a few verses earlier that after Jesus' resurrection, and over a period of some 40 days, Jesus has been "speaking about the kingdom of God" with his disciples and "order[ing] them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father." We heard about that promise last week, of course, the promise of the Holy Spirit. The one who would come and abide with them and dwell in them always.

That promise is made again in what we understand to be Jesus' very last words: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you," he says, "and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." In his last words, Jesus reiterates that they are to wait and makes clear what they are waiting for – the Holy Spirit and her empowering of them. Why? Because they have a call to fulfill. Jesus' disciples were never meant to just stand there, staring up and after him like they did when he disappeared into the clouds. They were called to become his witnesses, to live their lives in such a way that it pointed to Jesus.

And that's exactly what the disciples do. We read in the very next verse, that they return to Jerusalem, go to the "room upstairs where they were staying" (they self-quarantined as it were), and that they then "were constantly devoting themselves to prayer." They got busy with their waiting.

Friends, scripture tells us that after 9 days of waiting, the Holy Spirit did indeed arrive, and from all the stories that come after that moment, we know that Jesus' earliest disciples and many afterwards did indeed receive power. They were transformed from fearful, reluctant, self-focused people, into bold, courageous, risk-taking witnesses of Jesus. Our very presence in worship today, some 2,000 years later and more than 5,000 miles away, surely bears witness to their obedience and faithfulness to Jesus' call.

As I thought about Jesus' last words and the disciples' response, I began to wonder what if we focused this strange and stretching time of waiting, not on all things coronavirus, not on the return to "normal life", but on waiting for the Holy Spirit? What if we took some cues

from those first disciples and devoted ourselves to prayer during this time, inviting God to empower us and embolden us to be Jesus' witnesses, to help us see clearly what that looks like in each of our lives? What if we waited...not so that we could somehow "go back", but so that we might go forward...go forward into a future rooted solidly in the kingdom values of love, justice, wholeness, and liberation? What if we relished our waiting – hard and uncertain as it is – as a time to experience God abiding with us and dwelling in us? What if?

Friends, I want to encourage you to grab hold of this "what if" over the coming week with this 7 day challenge: to pray every day this 4 word breath prayer, "Come, Holy Spirit, come." As you inhale, pray "Come, Holy Spirit", hold for a moment, then as you exhale, pray, "come." (You might try it now.)

May we continue to wait – not in fear, not with troubled hearts, and not alone - but with an openness towards and an anticipation of God's Spirit being poured out on us anew. Come, Holy Spirit, come!

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.*

Joys –Where are you witnessing resurrection...in yourself and in the world?

Concerns – Where are you yearning for resurrection...in yourself and in the world?

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.

When you are ready, pray the words that Jesus taught his disciples beginning, "Our Father..."

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). Take a moment and do that now.

CLOSING HYMN - "God of Grace and God of Glory" UMH 577

Listen here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MUioKmx_vvA

God of grace and God of glory,
on they people pour thy power;
crown thine ancient church's story;
bring her bud to glorious flower.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,
for the facing of this hour, for the facing of this hour.

Cure thy children's warring madness,
bend our pride to thy control;
shame our wanton, selfish gladness,
rich in things and poor in soul.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,
lest we miss thy kingdom's goal, lest we miss thy kingdom's goal.

Save us from weak resignation
to the evils we deplore;
let the search for thy salvation
be our glory evermore.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,
serving thee whom we adore, serving thee whom we adore.

CLOSING AFFIRMATION -

We know Jesus is present among us
even in this very home
We will not let fear be louder than love
but with glad hearts and rejoicing souls
we will sing God's praise
for we are Easter People!

BENEDICTION - *(based on Psalm 16)*

As we close this time together, remember:
God is always with you. No matter what you face,
no matter what trials or hardships come your way,
God is right beside you, always filling your cup to overflowing,
guiding and directing your path.
So, acknowledge your fear and your worry
and know it is as true and holy as any feeling,
including joy, hope, courage and love.
Take heart! Knowing that as your heart overflows,
you are connected to the heart of the matter. **Amen.**

NOW GO AND PASS CHRIST'S PEACE!

You are invited to spend the next stretch reaching out. Pick up our directory and consider calling someone you don't yet know well or someone who might not know others. It doesn't need to be complicated. Perhaps something as simple as, "Hi! I'm calling to say 'hello'. How have you been?"



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Scripture for Sunday, May 31st - **Acts 2:1-21**