



Worship Celebration
June 12th, 2022

Twin Towers United Methodist Church
1411 Oak Street, Alameda, CA 94501
510.522.6744 twintowers.office@gmail.com 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, 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://re-worship.blogspot.com/>]

Gracious God,
in love You open wide the doors
and welcome us into Your presence—
saints and sinners alike.
You spread a table before us,
filled with the richest fare—
a feast of love and mercy
for the body and soul.

We come with joy to meet You here,
to nourished by your presence and Spirit,
to taste and see Your goodness,
to celebrate Your grace and mercy in our lives.

May Your Spirit inspire our praise and thanksgiving,
our prayers and petitions
as we worship together in Your presence.

In the name of Jesus Christ, our host and Lord, **Amen.**

CENTERING HYMN - “I Come to the Garden Alone”

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

SCRIPTURE READING - Psalm 23, NRSV

¹The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

²He makes me lie down in green pastures;

he leads me beside still waters;

³ he restores my soul.

He leads me in right paths

for his name's sake.

⁴ Even though I walk through the darkest valley,

I fear no evil,

for you are with me;

your rod and your staff,

they comfort me.

⁵ You prepare a table before me

in the presence of my enemies;

you anoint my head with oil;

my cup overflows.

⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me

all the days of my life,

and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord

my whole life long.

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

LISTEN - We give great thanks to **Rev. Judith Pruess-Mellows, Deacon** for sharing the message this morning. You can listen to it [here](#).

It is so wonderful to be with you today and to use as my main scripture the beloved Psalm 23. In my experience as minister of visitation for many years at Los Altos United Methodist Church and in visiting my own mother in her later years, I've seen that people get great comfort from hearing this Psalm.

The early church sang Psalm 23 as the newly baptized person emerged from the font and proceeded into the church for Eucharist. Contemporary churches turn to this Psalm for holy communion and funerals. The Psalm shows an overlay of traditions about journeying through the wilderness and renewing the covenant; the release of an individual from trial; the return from exile; a liturgical ceremony of Thanksgiving and a sacred meal. Every verse expresses trust and thanksgiving. Although often used at funeral services, this Psalm is more about God centered living than it is about death.

I'd like to look at this Psalm more closely, using the New Revised Standard Bible: "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want."

Right off the bat we have a problem. Not everyone resonates with the masculine terms the “Lord” and the pronoun He to refer to the divine. This is the first image I would like to explore. In Luke 13:34 and Matthew 23:37, the image of God is as a mother hen gathering her chicks under her wings. In her book of 365 names for God, Sister Joyce Rupp writes this: Like a mother hen with chicks you attentively care for us, gathering us under your wing, feeding us with wisdom, protecting us from harm, nursing our wounds, teaching us responsibility, leading us on the way, expecting us to follow, trusting us to grow up (2011, March 14). Like a mother hen with chicks, God cares for us.

Rabbi Rami Schapiro, a Jewish contemplative and interfaith teacher, describes how the divine feminine has been present all along as Wisdom, God’s essential partner in the creation of the cosmos. The original language of the texts, both Hebrew and Greek, make this very clear: the Hebrew Chochma and the Greek Sophia are both feminine nouns. The authors of the wisdom books of the Bible such as Proverbs, Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiastes and others took this gender specificity seriously and envisioned Wisdom as Mother, God's consort and bride, the Divine Feminine through which the masculine God fashioned all creation (Rohr, email from Center for Action and Contemplation, March 13, 2022.) Author Virginia Mollenkott wrote a whole book entitled *The Divine Feminine: Biblical Imagery of God as Female*.

So now let's look at the image of the shepherd: Another beautiful prayer by Joyce Rupp: I have been in that bleak valley [O God], when the last bit of joyfulness was sucked out of my spirit by the ripping winds of desolation. In those times of extended anguish the memory of green pastures with you shepherding my way brought me strength to go on. Shepherd now others in need as they stumble on their dark road (2011, April 4).

Matthew Henry, a Bible commentator, says, The image of the shepherd denotes the great care that God takes of us. There was a time when David himself, the possible writer of this psalm, was a shepherd, “so he knew by experience the cares and tender affections of a good shepherd towards the flock. He remembered what need they had of a shepherd and what a kindness it was to them to have one that was skillful and faithful; he once ventured his life to rescue a lamb.” He illustrated God's care of God's people; and to this Jesus seems to refer when he says, "I am the shepherd of the sheep, the good shepherd" in John 10:11. God that is the shepherd of Israel, of the whole church in general, is the shepherd of each of us. God takes us into the fold and then takes care of us, protects us, and provides for us, with more care and constancy than a shepherd can.... " If God is a shepherd to us, we should know the shepherd's voice and follow it.

In “He makes me lie down in green pastures,” the idea is that we "have the supports and comforts of this life from God's good hand...." We taste the goodness of God and relish that, even though we might not have much in the world, it is still a green pasture. “God's words are the green

pastures in which food is provided for all believers... green pastures for faith to feed in.” God makes us lie down in quiet and contentment in our own minds, whatever our lot is; our souls dwell at ease in God, and that makes every pasture green. It's not enough to pass through them, but let us lie down in them, abide in them.

Both Isaiah and Ezekiel depict God as a shepherd. In Isaiah 40:11, we have this: “See, the Lord God... will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep.” In Ezekiel 34:11-16, we have this: “For thus says the Lord God: I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. As shepherds seek out their flocks when they are among their scattered sheep, so I will seek out my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places to which they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land; and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the water courses, and in all the inhabited parts of the land. I will feed them with good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel shall be their pleasure; there they shall lie down in good grazing land, and they shall feed on rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord God.”

God leads us beside the still waters and restores our souls. We are well guided by God. We who feed on God's goodness need to follow God's direction. God leads us by God's word, by spirit, directs our eyes, our ways, and our hearts in God's love. God provides for us not only food and rest but refreshment and pleasure. God leads us not to standing waters which gather filth, not to the troubled sea, nor to rapid rolling floods, but to silent waters.

God leads us in the paths of righteousness, in the way of our duties and responsibilities. God instructs us by the Word and directs us by conscience and prayer. These are the paths we all desire to be led along, never to turn aside from them. We cannot walk in these paths unless God leads us into them and in them.

What we're actually talking about here is trusting God. Part of trusting God is overcoming our fear of God. Henri Nouwen says: “Jesus came to us to help us overcome our fear of God. As long as we are afraid of God, we cannot love God. God means intimacy, closeness, mutual vulnerability, and a deep sense of safety. But all of those are impossible as long as there is fear....The greatest block in the spiritual life is fear. Prayer, meditation, and education cannot come forth out of fear. God is perfect love, and as John the Evangelist writes, perfect love drives out fear (1 John 4:18). Jesus' central message is that God loves us with an unconditional love and desires” in return our love free from all fear. God desires our trust, as sheep trust the shepherd.

With God as our shepherd, we are helped when anything ails us. God restores our souls. We all

are prone to go astray like lost sheep. We miss our way and turn aside into bypaths, but when God shows us our error, gives us the opportunity to repent and brings us back to the right path, God restores our souls. If God did not do this, we would wander endlessly, having lost our way.

Next in the Psalm: “Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff - they comfort me.” Joyce Rupp describes God’s comfort this way: [God,] When we are worn from a day's work or bent beneath our suffering, when we absorb the pain of another or tire from trying to do better, when we are fatigued from reaching out or lose the strength to resist injustice, you wrap your spacious maternal arms around our tiredness and affliction. You cradle us with infinite compassion and rock us gently with your love. (2011, Mar. 14)

Even though I walk through the darkest valley...It is perhaps this part of the Psalm that gives us the most comfort in times of grief, worry, and despair. In a book by Matthew, Sheila, and Dennis Linn entitled *Simple Ways To Pray for Healing*, Dennis writes about a time he and Sheila visited Jerusalem and specifically, the place Jesus called Gehenna. When they went to this valley, which is located in the southeast corner of Jerusalem, they were mindful that Jeremiah cursed this valley because an ancient cult had performed human sacrifice there. For centuries thereafter, including in Jesus’ time, this unholy and unclean site served as the garbage dump. As long as anyone could remember, deteriorating garbage had fueled Gehenna's continuous fire. Perhaps one reason Jesus used Gehenna, or hell, as an image of what happens to us when we behave in unloving ways was to remind us of what psychosomatic medicine has recently discovered. If we act in unloving ways, not only will we feel like garbage, but we will also find our physical body and our whole self deteriorating just as did Gehenna’s garbage.

Dennis says that the only other person in Gehenna that day was a shepherd caring for his herd of goats. Trying not to disturb him, they sat down at the far side and began their Holy Saturday vigil. A short while later, another man dressed as a shepherd entered the valley and greeted them. He walked through Gehenna for about a quarter of a mile. Then he suddenly turned around and walked back to them. He told them he had spotted some children whom he was afraid would come and stone them. He insisted on walking them to the other end of the valley where they would be safe. For 20 minutes this shepherd with his staff guided them safely, making sure that no one harmed them. They thanked him and sat down, now at the most extreme edge of Gehenna, to resume their vigil. About an hour later, as they turned to leave, they noticed him sitting high up on the wall of Jerusalem's old city that overlooked the valley. He had posted himself there as their sentry, still guarding them to be sure that nothing happened to them. When they finally exited, they waved to their shepherd who then climbed down from his sentry post and disappeared into the old city.

Isn't this a good image of how God as a Shepherd watches over us when we are going through the darkest valley? God refuses to abandon us and will not leave us to our own Gehenna, mired in an inability to give and receive love.

In his book, *Entering the Healing Ground* (2012), Francis Weller names 6 principal areas of suffering and grief. The first one relates to the impermanence of life. Nothing stays the same, consequently our life eventually loses some of the people and things we value. The second area relates to the places within us that have lived outside of our kindness, compassion, warmth, or welcome. Another area of suffering results from the collective sorrow of the world of which we are a part. The fourth loss comes from our dreams and the intangible longings that we expected and did not receive. The fifth one is ancestral grief, the unhealed sorrow inherited from our ancestors who were unable to tend to their losses. And the sixth area is trauma or soul loss, when the desire for life becomes so blunted that death becomes appealing and depression a way of life. How do we deal with these areas of suffering, these dark valleys? God gives us resiliency. Each of us contains that gift, Joyce Rupp (*Boundless Compassion*, 2018) says. Human beings not only have the power to survive and bounce back after inevitable loss, but we are also able to shape how we enter into this recovery. We can do more than endure our sufferings. Depending on our responses, suffering provides untold opportunities for inner transformation.

Langston Hughes' verse, "My soul has grown deep like rivers," conveys the power of suffering to transform us. Rupp says, "The energizing flow of rivers through land and rock often sculpts magnificent canyons and passageways. The river becomes a metaphor for suffering's power to transform the human spirit. It may take years, as does a river, to carve something new in our life, to form a passageway to another expression of the soul as yet un-lived. At the same time, we dare not idealize suffering as the only way to personal growth. Joy also transforms. Ask anyone who has received unconditional love, been forever influenced by a moment of nature's beauty, or known the unexpected departure of a terminal illness." All these are thanks to God, our Shepherd (pp. 70-71).

Rupp continues: "While the questions of why suffering happens and how God is involved elude satisfactory answers, we do have the assurance of this compassionate presence being with us. One of the most tender descriptions comes from Henry Nouwen and his coauthors: 'God's compassion is total, absolute, unconditional, without reservation. It is compassion of the one who keeps going to the most forgotten corners of the world, and who cannot rest as long as there are still human beings with tears in their eyes'"(pp. 71-72).

And so we finally come to God preparing a table before us in the presence of our enemies, anointing our heads with oil, our cups overflowing. Joyce Rupp, praying to God, describes it this way: You pester me to keep on growing and, remarkably, persist in believing in my inherent

ability to be more. At the same time, you continue to love me, pretenses, warts, and all. These continual nudges and urgings of yours furnish me with assurance that you'll assist me in my changing. Thank you, Extravagant Persistence, for never, ever giving up on me.

This certainly reminds me of my own mother, whom I was very fortunate to have. Widowed when I was age 10, she continued to shepherd me and love me with an endless affection. She lived to be 98 1/2, and in spite of her Alzheimer's, remained her sweet self up until the end. I give thanks for her and for all mothers. Like in the parable of the lost sheep, they will often leave the flock of 99 in the wilderness and go after the child that is lost until they find it. And so, as we enter the realm of goodness and mercy following us all the days of our lives, we give thanks that we can dwell in God's house our whole life long. 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 give towards a newly established fund at Twin Towers: **The Building Partnership Fund**. This Fund enables us to partner with like-minded organizations doing impactful work in our community by providing them with the basics of space. We believe that partnering in this way mutually strengthens and amplifies our mission and work in the community. We are especially excited to welcome our newest partner, **All Good Living Foundation!***

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 - “Precious Lord, Take My Hand”, UMH 474

Listen here: <https://youtu.be/5ysK1eN2mFI>

BENEDICTION - [Nathan Nettleton LaughingBird.net]

Go now with your trust in the good shepherd, and let us love, not just in words, but in truth and action.

Believe in the name of Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as he has commanded us.

And may God be at your side, even in valleys of death.

May Christ Jesus be the cornerstone of your life.

And may the Holy Spirit abide in you and tend you with love and mercy all the days of your life.

We go in peace to love and serve the Lord, . . . **In the name of Christ. Amen.**

NOW GO AND PASS CHRIST'S PEACE!

Please make notes of this news and invitations:

- **Grow, Grow, Grow** - How have you grown in faith and love over the last season? Over our time together? Would you give this some thought and jot an idea or two down? On June 19th, we will lift up and celebrate the ways the Holy Spirit has enabled our growth!
- **A Note from Our SPRC Chair, Cristina Quezon:**
The days have passed far too quickly after Pastor Emily announced that she and her family have decided to take a leave from her ministerial duties. While we will miss Pastor Emily, Steven, Papa Edgar Lin, Milo, and Imani, we all want the very best for the Chen-Lin Family.
To show our appreciation for Pastor's spiritual guidance, her community spirit, and never ending enthusiasm and encouragement, we want to hold a "bon voyage" Brunch Potluck. As we thank Pastor and her family, we also can pray for and bless their future life experiences.

Date: June 26th

Time: After TTUMC Services, approximately 10:30 a.m.

Place: TTUMC Social Hall/Gym*

Type: Brunch Potluck (Please see the Google doc potluck signup.)

We hope to take a group photo after Services on June 26th.

*Mask protocol: Masks should be worn unless eating.

Although Pastor has said no gifts, should you wish to donate a monetary love gift, please submit your donation no later than June 19th. Please make your check payable to TTUMC

with the notation P-Emily. Should you wish to present Pastor with a gift, please bring it to the Brunch.

Should you have any suggestions, comments, or questions, please feel free to contact me or Patty.

- **Showing Up for July 4th!** Our little town is well known for hosting the longest July 4th parade in the entire nation, a fun, family-oriented event. This year, we plan to join the parade with our sibling UMC's - Embrace, Bayside Cambodian, and Buena Vista. Please sign up to participate [here!](#)