



*Image from Pixaby*

**June 27th, 2021**

**Miracles V / The Hand that Holds and Guides Us**

***Twin Towers United Methodist Church***  
**1411 Oak Street, Alameda, CA 94501**  
**510.522.6744    [twintowers.office@gmail.com](mailto:twintowers.office@gmail.com)    [www.twintowersumc.org](http://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, 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** – *(Rev. Thom Shuman @ Lectionary Liturgies)*

We gather to worship our God,

**who speaks the words of peace we need in chaotic times.**

We gather to follow Jesus,

**who encourages us to not fear, for he is always coming towards us.**

We gather to be filled with the Spirit,

**who anoints us so we can go to serve our world.**

**OPENING PRAYER** - *(Source: Rev. Dr. Bob Gross @ Worship Ways)*

God of Presence,

as you walked upon the water to meet the disciples,

meet us in the midst of the storms in our lives.

God of Renewal,

as you lifted Peter from the water,

lift us from despair to hope,

from distraction to focus,

from death to life.

God of the Journey,

direct us in your way,

work out your purpose in and through our lives.

We pray in the name of Christ who lives and reigns with you

in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

**OPENING HYMN** - Make Us Holy, Make Us Whole, URW 160

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

In your love, make us whole

May we rest in your compassion

On the long, weary stroll,  
In the warmth of your love,  
may your peace fill our hearts

May we know the love of Jesus.  
By your grace, you console,  
make us holy, make us whole.

**SCRIPTURE - Matthew 14:22-32**

<sup>22</sup> Immediately [Jesus] made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. <sup>23</sup> And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, <sup>24</sup> but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. <sup>25</sup> And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea. <sup>26</sup> But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, “It is a ghost!” And they cried out in fear. <sup>27</sup> But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, “Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.”

<sup>28</sup> Peter answered him, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” <sup>29</sup> He said, “Come.” So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. <sup>30</sup> But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, “Lord, save me!” <sup>31</sup> Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?” <sup>32</sup> When they got into the boat, the wind ceased.

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

**LISTEN** - *During our current worship series, members of the Healing Prayer Team are sharing their insights on the scripture story and their faith experiences with us. Today, Leigh Miller shared her story.*

Today’s scripture reading of Matthew 14: 22 - 32 had always seemed relatively straightforward for me. I read it as a story of Peter being asked by Jesus to come to him on the water, and Peter's fear was what led him to fail. Before this, Jesus had been taking some time alone to pray. He and the disciples had just come from Nazareth, where Jesus' hometown had rejected him. John the Baptist had recently been beheaded. The ruling powers of the religious elite were hostile towards Jesus. He and the disciples had also been caring for and feeding thousands of people that followed Jesus. No wonder he needed time alone in prayer! This was the setting on the night that Jesus sent his disciples out in a boat across a stormy lake. They wondered where he was? Jesus came out of the dark, walking on the water. The disciples were terrified, they wondered if he were a ghost? Or an evil spirit that he had cast out? They were filled with doubt when he called out to them. Peter challenges “if it is really you... “putting Jesus to the test. If it is Jesus, he will give him the power to walk on water. We've been taught that Peter's effort was a noble act of well meaning faith, and

his sudden fear and failure of his faith made him sink. Is this how you, too, have heard this scripture read and preached in the past?

The whole story changed for Flora Wuellner, the author of *Miracle*, when she saw the story in a different light. She writes how it was not Jesus's plan or guidance that Peter leaves the boat and walk on water. Jesus had asked only one thing: that the disciples take the boat across the lake to the other side. When Jesus came to them in the battering wind and called out to them in reassurance, he did not tell them to prove their faith by leaving the boat. On the contrary, he was coming to *them*, moving swiftly across the waves. It was Peter's bright idea to leave the boat. Why did he do this? The author poses these questions: Was he challenging Jesus to prove that it was really he? Maybe he wanted to prove his own faith and courage? Did he want to be able to do all the things that Jesus did? Did he act on the impulse of his love for Jesus? Was Peter acting outside God's guidance? Was his urge to walk on water a temptation, as Jesus had been tempted? Peter was, after all, abandoning ship, leaving others to the task of rowing in heavy weather.

I found myself wondering whether or not I should leave my own boat last year. The pandemic had just started, and I had gotten ill, not knowing at that point if I were sick with Covid 19. I was off from work at Highland Hospital for almost a month, and I wondered if I should even go back to work or just retire early. I was receiving a lot of advice from family and friends, but honestly didn't know if this were God's plan for my life. I ended up returning to work, but was still plagued with indecision about going ahead and retiring. After several more months, God gave me a sense of peace around the decision, and I went ahead and put in my notice to leave after the first week of August. But on July 25, my son-in-law, Mike, was killed in a tragic car accident. My daughter Sara was now suddenly a widow, and my grandson was left without his dad. I believe that God, of course, knew what was ahead and led me to go ahead to make plans to retire so that I could be there fully for my daughter and grandson during this horrific time. I look back, and am so glad that God led me "out of my boat" when He did.

I found myself in the opposite situation in June of 2004. I was celebrating the high school graduation of my daughter Raquel, and received a phone call from my brother Doug. He told me that our mother had fallen back on her bed and broken her femur. My career was in X-ray technology and I had had some experience in radiation oncology as well. I knew that someone did not break their femur just by falling back on their bed. I booked the first flight out to Pennsylvania to be with my mother and father. Two years earlier, they had moved to a Methodist retirement community called Cornwall Manor. It afforded the residents the ability to live independently, in assisted living, and also provided a Health Center. My mother's diagnosis was what I had feared, it was cancer. For the next two months, my sister and I would take turns flying from our homes to our parents' home, so one of us would be there to help with care and support. After being

discharged from the hospital, my mother was sent to the Health Center at Cornwall. She was receiving the care that she needed; radiation therapy, physical therapy and nursing care. However, during this time, I got it into my mind that I needed to uproot my life in California and move myself and children to Pennsylvania where I could continue to be an extra caregiver for my parents. I had gone so far as to look at houses in the area, yet when I was home waiting to meet a realtor to sell my condo, I found myself collapsing on the floor in tears. My brother was the one who finally was able to snap me out of it, and was able to speak what I'm sure that God had been trying to tell me all along. He basically said, what are you doing? This is not the right thing for you or for your girls. I was so caught up in what I thought I needed to do, I hadn't stopped and listened for God's guidance. I did continue making trips to Pennsylvania, and flew my daughters out as well to spend the last week or so with my mother. I was so glad that they were there with me at the time, but moving us all out to live there would not have been the right decision. In opening up to God's guidance, we were all able to be there for my mother in the way that God had planned for us. Have you ever "left the boat", as Wuellner puts it, and decided on a path, a change of direction, or taken on a task without God's guidance or leading?

God gives us free will, which means we have permission to do unwise things. God does not force wisdom on us if we choose not to ask, but to move impulsively on our own initiative. Peter did not ask for guidance. He told Jesus to prove himself, and this was the test that he, Peter, chose to give. Flora Wuellner states that she had read that if we do not say to God, Thy will be done, God will say to us in sorrow, very well, then thy will be done! And we are left with the consequences of our own sometimes destructive choices.

Wuellner's reading of today's scripture invites us to ask the question: How do we tell the difference between God's guidance and our own impetuous enthusiasms? These are some examples given by Flora Wuellner to ask ourselves: Am I neglecting a major responsibility to which I am already committed? Do I really have the stamina and energy to undertake extra projects, no matter how worthy? Am I impossibly crowding my day? Is any space left for rest and renewal? Is the quality of my work diminishing? Is my physical health giving me signals? She states that our bodies can be our best spiritual directors by telling the truth about our choices. How will my decision affect those around me? We can also ask: Who will have to row the boat while I am out walking on the water? Am I taking on this job because I have genuine love and gifts for this project, or only because it is a worthy task and someone has to do it? She ends with, "I believe God has quiet tenderness for us, when in our enthusiastic pride, or in our desire to test God and ourselves, we leap into places where God has not told us to go. She believes that when Jesus said to Peter "You of little faith, why did you doubt? he spoke with amused warmth, not

with anger. When he got Peter back into the boat, Jesus probably said to his friends, now let's get back to rowing, I'm here to work with you.

The wind ceased, says verse 32. As the disciples went about their work, perhaps they whispered to one another that their Jesus had been near them all the time. Even while praying in the mountains, he was seeing them, holding them, and guiding them with his hands. I know that God was with me during the time of my mother's illness and eventual death two months later. He spoke to me through my brother, when I was walking on water and trying to do things my own way. It is such a comfort to know that Jesus is always there, right beside us, even if we are saying MY will be done.

### **SONG OF RESPONSE/MEDITATION - Tis so Sweet to Trust in Jesus**

*Watch and Listen here:* <https://youtu.be/xT2FI6kroH8>

**HEALING PRAYER EXPERIENCE** - *Give yourself a quiet time in a safe space with these intentions:*

- *To invite a meaningful and healing prayer experience*
- *To encounter Jesus through prayer*

Sit comfortably with your feet firmly planted on the ground. You are encouraged to close your eyes and to take a few slow, deep breaths. Feel your breath fill your lungs and flow out again. Then breathe normally.

During today's prayer time, you are invited to look with God at what is happening in your life right now. Do you feel you are working at the tasks to which God has guided you? In what ways did you feel guided to your current tasks and work? How do you feel about the tasks now? Has anything changed? Does it feel as though you are going with the wind...or as though the wind is blowing against you at the moment? Does God seem close or far away?

Think of some time in the past when you decided to do more than what you were already doing, or of a time when you decided to do something altogether different. How did you come to the decision? Did you pray about it? Did you bring it to God to discern? What happened in the end? As you look back on the experience, do you feel now that your decision was God's guidance? If so, what were the signs? If not, what were the results?

Rest for a moment as you hold this past experience and your present moment in God's light. When you feel ready, consider: What is your present "boat"? What is the "water" you might want to walk on? What will be the consequences for others around you if you do so?

Move more deeply into inner quietness. What do you sense God saying to you?

Try with honesty to ask, “God, what is it you would have me do?”

When you feel ready, move quietly out of your meditation. You might take a few deep breaths, gently massage your face or hands, and when ready, open your eyes and breathe naturally. In the days to come, stay alert for signs of guidance.

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

**CLOSING HYMN** - “There’s Within My Heart a Melody” UMH 380, vs. 1, 3, 4  
*Listen here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3SVu7YiD\\_ds](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3SVu7YiD_ds)*

There’s within my heart a melody  
Jesus whispers sweet and low:  
Fear not, I am with thee, peace,  
be still, in all of life’s ebb and flow.

*Refrain:*

Jesus, Jesus, Jesus,  
sweetest name I know,  
fills my every longing,  
keeps me singing as I go.

3. Though sometimes he leads  
through waters deep,  
trials fall across the way,  
though sometimes the path  
seems rough and steep,  
see his footprints all the way.
4. Feasting on the riches of his grace,  
resting neath his sheltering wing,  
always looking on his smiling face,  
that is why shout and sing.

**BENEDICTION -** (*Source: Nancy Townley*)

Beloved of God, healed and forgiven,

blessed and strengthened:

go forth to be a blessing to others,

proclaiming the love and mercy of God in all that you do and say! AMEN.

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

**NEXT WEEK'S SCRIPTURE:** Mark 6:1-13

This week's news and notes:

- **Call Out: Worship Tech Team!** We are looking for tech savvy eager learners who feel called to support the vibrancy of our ongoing online worship to join the team. We will be launching training opportunities lead by Embrace to help us prepare for hybrid worship upon re-opening. This is important and essential work! Will you join? Please connect with me.
- **Celebrating the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR)!** We will worship jointly with our sister churches, Lake Merritt, Lake Park, and Chinese Community UMCs next **Sunday, July 4th, at 10:30 a.m.** for this special Sunday worship. We are thrilled to have as our preachers, Burt & Jane Yin. Your special giving will go support the relief and disaster response work of UMCOR in our Annual Conference and around the world. Please give generously! You can do so by designating your giving through our website or by writing UMCOR on your check's memo line. To learn more about the important work of UMCOR, please visit [here](#). Thank you!
- **Community Health Study & Action Team** will not meet in July. Next meeting is August 7th. Please connect with Fred Fielding for the Zoom link.

I invite and welcome your connection: to share prayer, for a chat, to explore our lives of faith, and more.

Peace,  
Emily